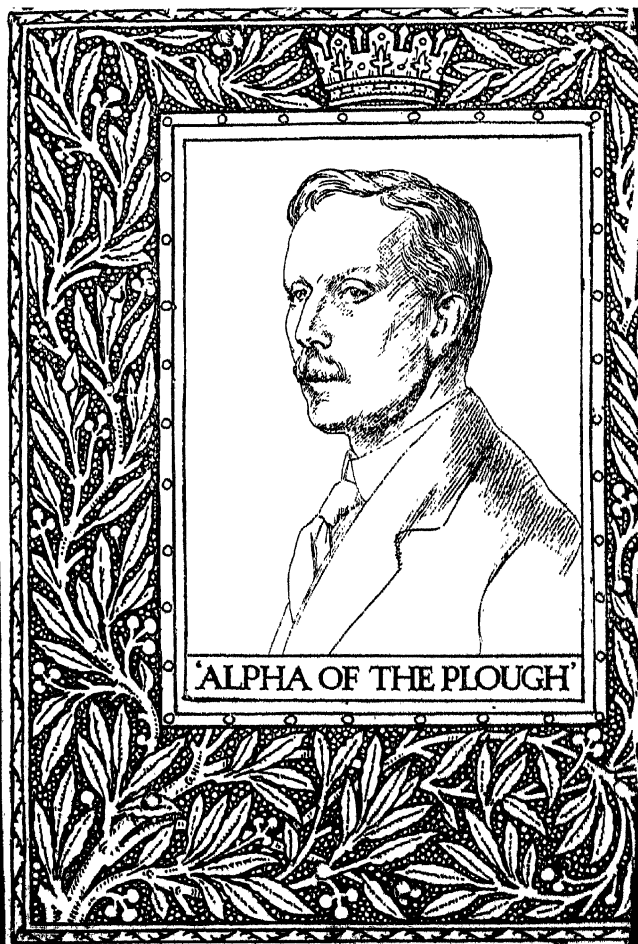




*The* KINGS TREASURIES  
OF LITERATURE

GENERAL EDITOR  
SIR A. T. QUILLER COUCH



# 'ALPHA OF THE PLOUGH'

FIRST SERIES

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'PEBBLES ON THE SHORE'  
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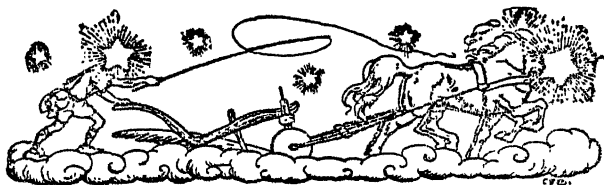
J. M. DENT & SONS LTD.  
Aldine House · Bedford St. · London

Made in Great Britain  
by  
The Temple Press · Letchworth · Herts  
First published (in this edition) 1920  
Last reprinted 1949

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# ALPHA OF THE PLOUGH

## ON CHOOSING A NAME

“As for your name, I offer you the whole firmament to choose from.” In that prodigal spirit the editor of the *Star* invites me to join the constellation that he has summoned from the vasty deeps of Fleet Street. I am, he says, to shine punctually every Wednesday evening, wet or fine, on winter nights and summer eves, at home or abroad, until such time as he cries: “Hold, enough!” and applies the extinguisher that comes to all.

The invitation reaches me in a tiny village on a spur of a range of beech-clad hills, whither I have fled for a breathing space from the nightmare of the war and the menacing gloom of the London streets at night. Here the darkness has no terrors. In the wide arch of the sky our lamps are lit nightly as the sun sinks down far over the great plain that stretches at our feet. None of the palpitations of Fleet Street disturb us, and the rumours of the war come to us like far-off echoes from another world.



The only sensation of our day is when, just after darkness has fallen, the sound of a whistle in the tiny street of thatched cottages announces that the postman has called to collect letters.

In this solitude, where one is thrown entirely upon one's own resources, one discovers how dependent one is upon men and books for inspiration. It is hard even to find a name. Not that finding a name is easy in any circumstances. Every one who lives by his pen knows the difficulty of the task. I would rather write an article than find a title for it. The thousand words come easily (sometimes); but the five-words summary of the thousand, that is to flame at the top like a beacon light, is a gem that has to be sought in travail, almost in tears. I have written books, but I have never found a title for one that I have written. That has always come to me from a friend.

Even the men of genius suffer from this impoverishment. When Goldsmith had written the finest English comedy since Shakespeare he did not know what to call it, and had to leave Johnson to write the label. I like to think that Shakespeare himself suffered from this sterility—that he, too, sat biting the feather of his quill in that condition of despair that is so familiar to smaller men. Indeed, we have proof that it was so in the titles themselves. Is not the title, *As You Like It*, a confession that he had bitten his quill until he was tired of the vain search for a name? And what is *Twelfth Night*: or *What*

*You Will* but an evidence that he could not hit upon any name that would fit the most joyous offspring of his genius?

What parent does not know the same agony? To name a child, to give him a sign that shall go with him to his grave, and that shall fit that mystery of the cradle which time and temptation and trial shall alone reveal—*hoc opus, hic labor est*. Many fail by starting from false grounds—fashion, ambition, or momentary interest. Perhaps the little stranger arrives with the news of a battle, or when a popular novel appears, or at a moment when you are under the influence of some austere or heroic name. And forgetful that it is the child that has to bear the burden of your momentary impulse, you call him Inkerman Jones, or Kitchener Smith, or Milton Spinks.

And so he is started on his journey, like a little historical memory, or challenging comparison with some hero of fact or fable. Perhaps Milton Spinks grows up bow-legged and commonplace—all Spinks and no Milton. As plain John he would pass through life happy and unnoticed, but the great name of Milton hangs about him like a jest from which he can never escape—no, not even in the grave, for it will be continued there until the lichen has covered the name on the headstone with stealthy and kindly oblivion.

It is a good rule, I think, to avoid the fanciful in names. So few of our children are going to be

heroes or sages that we should be careful not to stamp them with the mark of greatness at the outset of the journey. Horatio was a happy stroke for Nelson, but how few Horatios win immortality, or deserve it! And how disastrous if Horatio turns out a knave and a coward! If young Spinks has any Miltonic fire within him, it will shine through plain John more naturally and lustrously than through any borrowed patronymic. You may be as humble as you like, and John will fit you: as illustrious as you like, and John will blaze as splendid as your deeds, linking you with that great order of nobility of which John Milton, John Hampden, and John Bright are types.

I had written thus far when it occurred to me that I had still my own name to choose and that soon the whistle of the postman would be heard in the street. I went out into the orchard to take counsel with the stars. The far horizon was still stained wine-red with the last embers of the day; northward over the shoulder of the hill the yellow moon was rising full-orbed into the night sky and the firmament glittered with a thousand lamps.

How near and familiar they seem to one in the solitude of the country! In the town our vision is limited to the street. We see only the lights of the pavement and hear only the rattle of the unceasing traffic. The stars seem infinitely removed from our life.

But here they are like old neighbours for whom

we never look in vain, intimate though eternal, friendly and companionable though far off. There is Orion coming over the hill, and there the many-jewelled Pleiades, and across the great central dome of the sky the vast triangle formed by the Pole Star, golden Arcturus (not now visible), and ice-blue Vega. But these are not names for me. Better are those homely sounds that link the pageant of night with the immemorial life of the fields. Arcturus is <sup>pointing to</sup> Alpha of the Herdsman <sup>in a group of stars</sup> Shall it be that?

And then my eye roves northward to where the Great Bear hangs head downwards as if to devour the earth. Great Bear, Charles's Wain, the Plough, the Dipper, the Chariot of David—with what fancies the human mind through all the ages has played with that glorious constellation! Let my fancy play with it too. There at the head of the Plough flames the great star that points to the pole. I will hitch my little wagon to that sublime image. I will be Alpha of the Plough.

## ON UMBRELLA MORALS

A SHARP shower came on as I walked along the Strand, but I did not put up my umbrella. The truth is I couldn't put up my umbrella. The frame would not work for one thing, and if it had worked, I would not have put the thing up, for I would no

more be seen under such a travesty of an umbrella than Falstaff would be seen marching through <sup>at Conner in London</sup> Coventry with his regiment of ragamuffins. The fact is, the umbrella is not my umbrella at all. It is the umbrella of some person who I hope will read these lines. He has got my silk umbrella. I have got the cotton one he left in exchange. I imagine him flaunting along the Strand under my umbrella, and throwing a scornful glance at the fellow who was carrying his abomination and getting wet into the bargain. I daresay the rascal chuckled as he eyed the said abomination. "Ah," he said gaily to himself, "I did you in that time, old boy. I know that thing. It won't open for nuts. And it folds up like a sack. Now, this umbrella . . ."

But I leave him to his unrighteous <sup>feelings</sup> ~~commurings~~. He is one of those people who have what I may call an umbrella conscience. You know the sort of person I mean. He would never put his hand in another's pocket, or forge a cheque or rob a till—not even if he had the chance. But he will swop umbrellas, or forget to return a book, or take a rise out of the railway company. In fact he is a thoroughly honest man who allows his honesty the benefit of the doubt. Perhaps he takes your umbrella at random from the barber's stand. He knows he can't get a worse one than his own. He may get a better. He doesn't look at it very closely until he is well on his way. Then, "Dear me! I've taken the wrong umbrella," he says, with an air of surprise, for he

likes really to feel that he has made a mistake. "Ah, well, it's no use going back now. He'd be gone. *And I've left him mine!*"

It is thus that we play hide-and-seek with our own conscience. It is not enough not to be found out by others; we refuse to be found out by ourselves. Quite impeccable people, people who ordinarily seem unspotted from the world, are afflicted with umbrella morals. It was a well-known preacher who was found dead in a first-class railway carriage with a third-class ticket in his pocket.

And as for books, who has any morals where they are concerned? I remember some years ago the library of a famous divine and literary critic, who had died, being sold. It was a splendid library of rare books, chiefly concerned with seventeenth-century writers, about whom he was a distinguished authority. Multitudes of the books had the marks of libraries all over the country. He had borrowed them and never found a convenient opportunity of returning them. They clung to him like precedents to law. Yet he was a holy man and preached admirable sermons, as I can bear witness. And, if you press me on the point, I shall have to own that it is hard to part with a book you have come to love.

Indeed, the only sound rule about books is that adopted by the man who was asked by a friend to lend him a certain volume. "I'm sorry," he said, "but I can't." "Haven't you got it?" asked the

other. "Yes, I've got it," he said, "but I make it a rule never to lend books. You see, nobody ever returns them. I know it is so from my own experience. Here, come with me." And he led the way to his library. "There," said he, "four thousand volumes. Every—one—of—'em—borrowed." No, never lend books. You can't trust your dearest friend there. I know. Where is that *Gil Blas* gone? Eh? And that *Silvio Pellico*? And . . . But why continue the list? . . . He knows. HE KNOWS.

And hats. There are people who will exchange hats. Now that is unpardonable. That goes outside that dim borderland of conscience where honesty and dishonesty dissemble. No one can put a strange hat on without being aware of the fact. Yet it is done. I once hung a silk hat up in the smoking-room of the House of Commons. When I wanted it, it was gone. And there was no silk hat left in its place. I had to go out bareheaded through Palace Yard and Whitehall to buy another. I have often wondered who was the gentleman who put my hat on and carried his own in his hand. Was he a Tory? Was he a Radical? It can't have been a Labour man, for no Labour man could put a silk hat on in a moment of abstraction. The thing would scorch his brow. Fancy Will Crooks in a silk hat! One would as soon dare to play with the fancy of the Archbishop of Canterbury in a bowler—a thought which seems almost impious.

It is possible, of course, that the gentleman who

took my silk umbrella did really make a mistake. Perhaps if he knew the owner he would return it with his compliments. The thing has been done. Let me give an illustration. I have myself exchanged umbrellas—often. I hope I have done it honestly, but one can never be quite sure. Indeed, now I come to think of it, that silk umbrella itself was not mine. It was one of a long series of exchanges in which I had sometimes gained and sometimes lost. My most memorable exchange was at a rich man's house where I had been invited to dine with some politicians. It was summer-time, and the weather being dry I had not occasion for some days afterwards to carry an umbrella. Then one day a sensation reigned in our household. There had been discovered in the umbrella-stand an umbrella with a gold band and a gold tassel, and the name of a certain statesman engraved upon it. There had never been such a super-umbrella in our house before. Before its golden splendours we were at once humbled and terrified—humbled by its magnificence, terrified by its presence. I felt as though I had been caught in the act of stealing the British Empire. I wrote a hasty letter to the owner, told him I admired his politics, but had never hoped to steal his umbrella; then hailed a cab, and took the umbrella and the note to the nearest dispatch office.

He was very nice about it, and in returning my own umbrella took all the blame on himself. "What," he said, "between the noble-looking gentleman



who thrust a hat on my head, and the second noble-looking gentleman who handed me a coat, and the third noble-looking gentleman who put an umbrella in my hand, and the fourth noble-looking gentleman who flung me into a carriage, I hadn't the least idea what I was taking. I was too bewildered by all the noble flunkeys to refuse anything that was offered me."

Be it observed, it was the name on the umbrella that saved the situation in this case. That is the way to circumvent the man with an umbrella conscience. I see him eyeing his exchange with a secret joy; then he observes the name and address and his solemn conviction that he is an honest man does the rest. After my experience to-day, I think I will engrave my name on my umbrella. But not on that baggy thing standing in the corner. I do not care who relieves me of that. It is anybody's for the taking.

### ON A BIT OF SEAWEED

THE postman came just now, and among the letters he brought was one from North Wales. It was fat and soft and bulgy, and when it was opened we found it contained a bit of seaweed. The thought that prompted the sender was friendly, but the momentary effect was to arouse wild longings for

the sea, and to add one more count to the indictment of the Kaiser, who had sent us for the holidays into the country, where we could obey the duty to economise, rather than to the seaside, where the temptations to extravagance could not be dodged. "Oh, how it smells of Sheringham," said one whose vote is always for the East Coast. "No, there is the smack of Sidmouth, and Dawlish, and Torquay in its perfume," said another, whose passion is for the red cliffs of South Devon. And so on, each finding, as he or she sniffed at the seaweed, the windows of memory opening out on to the foam of summer seas. And soon the table was enveloped in a rushing tide of recollection—memories of bathing and boating, of barefooted races on the sands, of jolly fishermen who always seemed to be looking out seaward for something that never came, of hunting for shells, and of all the careless raptures of dawn and noon and sunset by the seashore. All awakened by the smell of a bit of seaweed.

It is this magic of reminiscence that makes the world such a storehouse of intimacies and confidences. There is hardly a bird that sings, or a flower that blows, or a cloud that sails in the blue that does not bring us some hint from the past, and set us tingling with remembrance. We open a drawer by chance, and the smell of lavender issues forth, and with that lingering perfume the past is unrolled like a scroll, and places long unseen leap to the forward eye and voices long unheard are speaking to us.

We tread the path their feet have worn,  
We sit beneath their orchard trees,  
We hear, like them, the hum of bees,  
And rustle of the bladed corn.

Who can see the first daffodils of spring without feeling a sort of spiritual festival that the beauty of the flower alone cannot explain? The memory of all the springs of the past is in their dancing plumes. and the assurance of all the springs to come. They link us up with the pageant of nature, and with the immortals of our kind—with Wordsworth watching them in "sprightly dance" by Ullswater, with Herrick finding in them the sweet image of the beauty and transience of life, with Shakespeare greeting them "in the sweet o' the year" by Avon's banks long centuries ago.

And in this sensitiveness of memory to external suggestion there is infinite variety. It is not a collective memory that is awakened, but a personal memory. That bit of seaweed opened many windows in us, but they all looked out on different scenes and reminded us of something individual and inexplicable, of something which is a part of that ultimate loneliness that belongs to all of us. Everything speaks a private language to each of us that we can never translate to others. I do not know what the lilac says to you; but to me it talks of a garden-gate over which it grew long ago. I am a child again, standing within the gate, and I see the red-coated soldiers marching along with jolly jests and 'snatching the

lilac sprays from the tree as they pass. The emotion of pride that these heroes should honour our lilac tree by ravishing its blossoms all comes back to me, together with a flood of memories of the old garden and the old home and the vanished faces. Why that momentary picture should have fixed itself in the mind I cannot say; but there it is, as fresh and clear at the end of nearly fifty years as if it were painted yesterday, and the lilac tree bursting into blossom always unveils it again.

It is these multitudinous associations that give life its colour and its poetry. They are the garnerings of the journey, and unlike material gains they are no burden to our backs and no anxiety to our mind. "The true harvest of my life," said Thoreau, "is something as intangible and indescribable as the tints of morning and evening." It was the summary, the essence, of all his experience. "We are like bees foraging in the garden of the world, and hoarding the honey in the hive of memory." And no hoard is like any other hoard that ever was or ever will be. The cuckoo calling over the valley, the blackbird fluting in the low boughs in the evening, the solemn majesty of the Abbey, the life of the streets, the ebb and flow of Father Thames—everything whispers to us some secret that it has for no other ear, and touches a chord of memory that echoes in no other brain. Those deeps within us find only a crude expression in the vehicle of words and actions, and our intercourse with men touches but the surface

of ourselves. The rest is "as intangible and indescribable as the tints of morning and evening." It was one of the most companionable of men, William Morris, who said:

That God has made each one of us as lone  
As He Himself sits.

That is why, in moments of exaltation, our only refuge is silence, and the world of memory within answers the world of suggestion without.

"And what does the seaweed remind you of?" said one, as I looked up after smelling it. "It reminds me," I said, "of all the seas that wash our shores, and of all the brave sailors who are guarding these seas day and night, while we sit here secure. It reminds me also that I have an article to write, and that its title is 'A Bit of Seaweed.'"

### ON THE CHEERFULNESS OF THE BLIND

I WAS coming off a Tube train last evening when some one said to me: "Will you please give this gentleman an arm to the lift? He is blind." I did so, and found, as I usually find in the case of the blind, that my companion was uncommonly talkative and cheerful. This gaiety of the blind is a perpetual wonder to me. It is as though the outer light being quenched an inner light of the spirit illuminates the

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darkness. Outside the night is black and dread, but inside there is warmth and brightness. The world is narrowed to the circle of one's own mind, but the very limitation feeds the flame of the spirit, and makes it leap higher.

It was the most famous of blind Englishmen who in the days of his darkness made the blind Samson say:

He that hath light within his own clear breast  
May sit i' th' centre and enjoy bright day.

And it has been remarked in many cases in which men have gone blind that their cheerfulness so far from being diminished has by some miracle gained a new strength. In no case of which I have had any knowledge has it apparently had the contrary effect. The zest of living seems heightened. Not long ago Mr. Galsworthy wrote to the *Times* a letter in which he spoke with pity of the unhappiness of the blind, and there promptly descended on him an avalanche of protest from the blind themselves. I suppose there was never a man who seemed to have a more intense pleasure in life than the late Dr. Campbell, the founder of the Normal School for the Blind, who worked wonders in extending the range of the activities of the blind, and himself did such apparently impossible things as riding a bicycle and climbing mountains.

Nor was the case of Mr. Pulitzer, the famous proprietor of the *New York World*, less remarkable.

Night came down on him with terrible suddenness. He was watching the sunset from his villa in the Mediterranean one evening when he said: "How quickly the sun has set." "But it has not set," said his companion. "Oh, yes, it has; it is quite dark," he answered. In that moment he had gone stone blind. But I am told by those who knew him that his vivacity of mind was never greater than in the years of his blindness.

My friend Mr. G. W. E. Russell has a theory that the advantage of the blind over the deaf and dumb in this matter of cheerfulness is perhaps more apparent than real. He points out that it is in company that the blind is least conscious of his misfortune, and that the deaf and dumb is most conscious of it. That is certainly the case. In conversation the sightless are on an equality with the seeing, while the deaf and dumb are shut up in a terrible isolation. The fact that they see is not their gain but their loss. They watch the movement of the lips and the signs of laughter, but this only adds to the bitterness of the prison of soundlessness in which they dwell. Hence the appearance of gloom. On the other hand, in solitude the deaf and dumb has the advantage. All the colour and movement of life is before him, while the blind is not only denied that vision of the outside world, but has a restriction of movement that the other does not share. Mr. Russell's conclusion, therefore, is that while the happiest moments of the blind are those when he is observed, the

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happiest of the deaf and dumb are when he is not observed.

There is some measure of truth in this, but I believe, nevertheless, that the common impression is right, and that, judged by the test of the cheerful acceptance of affliction, the loss of sight is less depressing than the loss of hearing and speech. And this for a very obvious reason. After all, the main interest in life is in easy, familiar intercourse with our fellows. I love to watch a golden sunset, to walk in the high beech woods in spring—or, for that matter, in summer or autumn or winter—to see the apples reddening on the trees, and the hedge-rows thick with blackberries. But this is the setting of my drama—the scenery of the play, not the play itself. It is its human contacts that give life its vivacity and intensity. And it is the ear and tongue that are the channels of the cheerful interplay of mind with mind. In that interplay the blind man has full measure and brimming over. His very affliction intensifies his part in the human comedy and gives him a peculiar delight in homely intercourse. He is not merely at his ease in the human family: he is the centre of it. He fulfils Johnson's test of a good fellow: he is "a clubbable man."

And even in the enjoyment of the external world it may be doubted whether he does not find as much mental stimulus as the deaf-and-dumb. He cannot see the sunset, but he hears the shout of the cuckoo, the song of the lark, "the hum of bees, and rustle



of the bladed corn." And if, as usually happens, he has music in his soul, he has a realm of gold for his inheritance that makes life a perpetual holiday. Have you heard Mr. William Wolstenholme, the composer, improvising on the piano? If not, you have no idea what a jolly world the world of sounds can be to the blind. Of course, the case of the musician is hardly a fair test. With him, hearing is life and deafness death. There is no more pathetic story than that of Beethoven breaking the strings of the piano in his vain efforts to make his immortal harmonies penetrate his soundless ears. Can we doubt that had he been afflicted with blindness instead of deafness the tragedy of his life would have been immeasurably relieved? What peace, could he have heard his Ninth Symphony, would have slid into his soul. Blind Milton, sitting at his organ, was a less tragic figure and probably a happier man than Milton with a useless ear-trumpet would have been. Perhaps without the stimulus of the organ he could not have fashioned that song which, as Macaulay says in his grandiloquent way, "would not have misbecome the lips of those ethereal beings whom he saw with that inner eye, which no calamity could darken, flinging down on the jasper pavements their crowns of amaranth and gold."

It is probable that in a material sense blindness is the most terrible affliction that can befall us; but I am here speaking only of its spiritual effects, and in this respect the deprivation of hearing and

speech seems to involve a more forlorn state than the deprivation of sight. The one affliction means spiritual loneliness: the other deepens the spiritual intimacies of life. It was a man who had gone blind late in life who said: "I am thankful it is my sight which has gone rather than my hearing. The one has shut me off from the sun: the other would have shut me off from life."

### ON THE PHILOSOPHY OF HATS

THE other day I went into a hatter's to get my hat ironed. It had been ruffled by the weather, and I had a reason for wishing it to look as new and glossy as possible. And as I waited and watched the process of polishing, the hatter talked to me on the subject that really interested him—that is, the subject of hats and heads.

"Yes," said he, in reply to some remark I had made; "there's a wonderful difference in the shape of 'eads *and* the size. Now your 'ead is what you may call an ord'nary 'ead. I mean to say," he added, no doubt seeing a shadow of disappointment pass across my ordinary face, "I mean to say, it ain't what you would call extry-ord'nary. But there's some 'eads—well, look at that 'at there. It belongs to a gentleman with a wonderful funny-shaped 'ead, long and narrer and full of nobbles—'stror'nary 'ead 'e 'as. And as for sizes, it's wonderful what a difference

there is. I do a lot of trade with lawyers, and it's astonishing the size of their 'eads. You'd be surprised. I suppose it's the amount of thinking they 'ave to do that makes their 'eads swell. Now that 'at there belongs to Mr. — (mentioning the name of a famous lawyer), wonderful big 'ead 'e 'as—7½— that's what 'e takes, and there's lots of 'em takes over 7.

"It seems to me," he went on, "that the size of the 'ead is according to the occupation. Now I used to be in a seaport town, and I used to serve a lot of ship's captains. 'Stror'nary the 'eads they 'ave. I suppose it's the anxiety and worry they get, thinking about the tides and the winds and the icebergs and things. . . ."

I went out of the shop with my ord'nary 'ead, conscious of the fact that I had made a poor impression on the hatter. To him I was only a 6½ size, and consequently a person of no consequence. I should have liked to point out to him that it is not always the big heads that have the jewel in them. Of course, it is true that great men often have big heads. Bismarck's size was 7½, so was Gladstone's, so was Campbell-Bannerman's. But on the other hand, Byron had a small head, and a very small brain. And didn't Goethe say that Byron was the finest brain that Europe had produced since Shakespeare? I should not agree in ordinary circumstances, but as a person with a smallish head, I am prepared in this connection to take Goethe's word on the subject. As

Holmes points out, it is not the size of the brain but its convolutions that are important (I think, by the way, that Holmes had a small head). Now I should have liked to tell the hatter that though my head was small I had strong reason to believe that the convolutions of my brain were quite top-hole.

I did not do so and I only recall the incident now because it shows how we all get in the way of looking at life through our own particular peep-hole. Here is a man who sees all the world through the size of its hats. He reverences Jones because he takes  $7\frac{1}{2}$ ; he dismisses Smith as of no account because he only takes  $6\frac{3}{4}$ . In some degree, we all have this restricted professional vision. The tailor runs his eye over your clothes and reckons you up according to the cut of your garments and the degree of shininess they display. You are to him simply a clothes-peg and your merit is in exact ratio to the clothes you carry. The bootmaker looks at your boots and takes your intellectual, social and financial measurement from their quality and condition. If you are down-at-the-heel, the glossy condition of your hat will not alter his opinion about you. The hat does not come in his range of vision. It is not a part of his criteria.

It is so with the dentist. He judges all the world by its teeth. One look in your mouth and he has settled and immovable convictions about your character, your habits, your physical condition, your position, and your mental attributes. He touches a nerve and you wince. "Ah," says he to himself,

"this man takes too much alcohol and tobacco and tea and coffee." He sees the teeth are irregular. "Poor fellow," he says, "how badly he was brought up!" He observes that the teeth are neglected. "A careless fellow," he says. "Spends his money on follies and neglects his family I'll be bound." And by the time he has finished with you he feels that he could write your biography simply from the evidence of your teeth. And I daresay it would be as true as most biographies—and as false.

In the same way, the business man looks at life through the keyhole of his counting-house. The world to him is an "emporium," and he judges his neighbour by the size of his plate glass. And so with the financier. When one of the Rothschilds heard that a friend of his who had died had left only a million of money he remarked: "Dear me, dear me! I thought he was quite well off." His life had been a failure, because he had only put a million by for a rainy day. Thackeray expresses the idea perfectly in *Vanity Fair*:

"You see," said old Osborne to George, "what comes of merit and industry and judicious speculations and that. Look at me and my banker's account. Look at your poor grandfather Sedley and his failure. And yet he was a better man than I was, this day twenty years—a better man I should say by twenty thousand pounds."

I fancy I, too, have my professional way of looking at things, and am disposed to judge men, not by

what they do but by the skill they have in the use of words. And I know that when an artist comes into my house he "sizes me up" from the pictures on the wall, just as when the upholsterer comes he "places" me according to the style of the chairs and the quality of the carpet, or as when the gourmet comes he judges by the cooking and the wine. If you give him champagne he reverences you; if hock he puts you among the commonplace.

In short, we all go through life wearing spectacles coloured by our own tastes, our own calling, and our own prejudices, measuring our neighbours by our own tape-measure, summing them up according to our own private arithmetic. We see subjectively, not objectively; what we are capable of seeing, not what there is to be seen. It is not wonderful that we make so many bad guesses at that prismatic thing, the truth.

#### ON SEEING LONDON

I SEE that the *Spectator*, in reviewing a new book on the Tower, says that, whilst visitors to London usually visit that historic monument, Londoners themselves rarely visit it. There is, I suppose, a good deal of truth in this. I know a man who was born in London, and has spent all his working life in Fleet Street, who confesses that he has never yet been inside the Tower. It is not because he is lacking in

interest. He has been to St. Peter's at Rome, and he went to Madrid largely to see the Prado. If the Tower had been on the other side of Europe, I think he would probably have made a pilgrimage to it, but it has been within a stone's-throw of him all his life, and therefore he has never found time to visit it.

It is so, more or less, with most of us. Apply the test to yourself or to your friends who live in London, and you will probably be astonished at the number of precious things that you and they have not seen—not because they are so distant, but because they are so near. Have you been to the Record Office, for example? I haven't, although it is within a couple of hundred yards of where I work and although I know it is rich in priceless treasures. I am always going, but "never get," as they say in Lancashire. It is too handy.

I was talking the other day to a City merchant who lives at Sydenham, and who has never seen Hampstead Heath. He has been travelling from Sydenham to the City for a quarter of a century, and has worn the rut so deep that he cannot get out of it, and has hardly more likelihood of seeing the Northern Heights than of visiting the mountains of the moon. Yet Hampstead Heath, which he could see in a morning for the cost of a threepenny ride in the Tube, is one of the incomparable things of Nature. I doubt whether there is such a wonderful open space within the limits of any other great city. It has hints of the seaside and the mountain, the moor

and the down in most exquisite union, and the Spaniards Road is as noble a promenade as you will find anywhere.

This incuriousness is not a peculiarity of Londoners only. It is a part of that temporising habit that afflicts most of us. If a thing can be done at any time, then that is just the thing that never gets done. If my Fleet Street friend knew that the Tower was going to be blown to pieces by a Zeppelin to-morrow he would, I am sure, rush off to see it this afternoon. But he is conscious that he has a whole lifetime to see it in, and so he will never see it. We are most of us slackers at the bottom, and need the discipline of a timetable to keep us on the move. If I could put off writing this article till to-morrow I should easily convince myself that I hadn't time to write it to-day.

The point is very well expressed in that story of the Pope who received three American visitors in turn. "How long are you staying?" he said to the first. "Six months, your Holiness," was the reply. "You will be able to see something of Rome in that time," said the Pope. The second was staying three months. "You will see a great deal of Rome in three months," said the Pope. The third was only staying three weeks. "You'll see all there is to be seen in Rome in three weeks," was the Pope's comment. He was a good judge of human nature.

But if we Londoners are no worse than most people we certainly miss more, for there is no such book of revelation as this which we look at so differently.



love to walk its streets with those who know its secrets. Mr. John Burns is such a one. The very stones begin to be eloquent when he is about. They pour out memories at his invitation as the rock poured out water at the touch of Moses. The houses tell you who built them and who lived in them and where their stone came from. The whole pageant of history passes before you, and you see the spot where Julius Cæsar crossed the river at Battersea—where else should he cross?—you discover, it may be for the first time, the exquisite beauty of Waterloo Bridge, and learn what Canova said about it. York Gate tells you of the long past when the Embankment was not, and when great nobles came through that archway to take the boat for Westminster or the Tower. He makes you dive out of the Strand to see a beautiful doorway, and out of Fleet Street to admire the Henry room. Every foot of Whitehall babbles its legends; you see Tyburn as our forefathers saw it, and George Fox meeting Cromwell there on his return from Ireland. In Westminster Hall he is at his best. You feel that he knew Rufus and all the masons who built that glorious fabric. In fact, you almost feel that he built it himself, so vividly does its story live in his mind and so strong is his sense of possession.

If I were a Dictator I would make him the Great Showman of London. I would have him taking us round and inspiring us with something of his own delight in our astonishing City. We should no longer

look upon London then as if it were a sort of Bradshaw's Guide: we should find it as fascinating as a fairy tale, as full of human interest as a Canterbury Pilgrimage. We should never go to Snow Hill without memories of Fagin, or to Eastcheap without seeing Falstaff swaggering along its pavements. Bread Street would resound to us with the tread of young Milton, and Southwark with the echoes of Shakespeare's voice and the jolly laughter of the Pilgrims at the Tabard. Hogarth would accompany us about Covent Garden, and out of Bolt Court we should see the lumbering figure of Johnson emerging into his beloved Fleet Street. We should sit by the fountain in the Temple with Tom Pinch, and take a wherry to Westminster with Mr. Pepys. We should see London then as a great spiritual companionship, in which it is our privilege to have a fleeting part.

### ON CATCHING THE TRAIN

THANK heaven! I have caught it. . . . I am in the corner seat, the compartment is not crowded, the train is about to start, and for an hour and a half, while we rattle towards that haven of solitude on the hill that I have written of aforetime, I can read, or think, or smoke, or sleep, or talk, or write as I choose. I think I will write, for I am in the humour for writing. Do you know what it is to be in the humour for writing—to feel that there is a head of

steam somewhere that must blow off? It isn't so much that you have something you want to say as that you must say something. And, after all, what does the subject matter? Any peg will do to hang your hat on. The hat is the thing. That saying of Rameau fits the idea to perfection. Some one was asking that great composer if he did not find difficulty in selecting a subject. "Difficulty? A subject?" said Rameau. "Not at all. One subject is as good as another. Here, bring me the *Dutch Gazette*."

That is how I feel now, as the lights of London fade in our wake and the fresh air of the country blows in at the window. Subject? Difficulty? Here, bring me the *Dutch Gazette*. But while any subject would serve there is one of particular interest to me at this moment. It came into my mind as I ran along the platform just now. It is the really important subject of catching trains.

There are some people who make nothing of catching trains. They can catch trains with as miraculous an ease as Cinquevalli catches half-a-dozen billiard-balls. I believe they could catch trains in their sleep. They are never too early and never too late. They leave home or office with a quiet certainty of doing the thing that is simply stupefying. Whether they walk, or take a bus, or call a taxi, it is the same: they do not hurry, they do not worry, and when they find they are in time and that there's plenty of room they manifest no surprise.

I have in mind a man with whom I once went walking among the mountains on the French-Italian border. He was enormously particular about trains and arrangements the day or the week before we needed them, and he was wonderfully efficient at the job. But as the time approached for catching a train he became exasperatingly calm and leisured. He began to take his time over everything and to concern himself with the arrangements of the next day or the next week, as though he had forgotten all about the train that was imminent, or was careless whether he caught it or not. And when at last he had got to the train, he began to remember things. He would stroll off to get a time-table or to buy a book, or to look at the engine—especially to look at the engine. And the nearer the minute for starting the more absorbed he became in the mechanism of the thing, and the more animated was his explanation of the relative merits of the P.L.M. engine and the North-Western engine. He was always given up as lost, and yet always stepped in as the train was on the move, his manner aggravatingly unruffled, his talk pursuing the quiet tenor of his thought about engines or about what we should do the week after next.

Now I am different. I have been catching trains all my life, and all my life I have been afraid I shouldn't catch them. Familiarity with the habits of trains cannot get rid of a secret conviction that their aim is to give me the slip if it can be done. No

faith in my own watch can affect my doubts as to the reliability of the watch of the guard or the station clock or whatever deceitful signal the engine-driver obeys. Moreover, I am oppressed with the possibilities of the delay on the road to the station. They crowd in on me like ghosts into the tent of King Richard. There may be a block in the streets, the bus may break down, the taxi-driver may be drunk or not know the way, or think I don't know the way, and take me round and round the squares as Tony Lumpkin drove his mother round and round the pond, or—in fact, anything may happen, and it is never until I am safely inside (as I am now) that I feel really happy.

Now, of course, this is a very absurd weakness. I ought to be ashamed to confess it. I am ashamed to confess it. And that is the advantage of writing under a pen name. You can confess anything you like, and nobody thinks any the worse of you. You ease your own conscience, have a gaol delivery of your failings—look them, so to speak, straight in the face, and pass sentence on them—and still enjoy the luxury of not being found out. You have all the advantages of a conviction without the nuisance of the penalty. Decidedly, this writing under a pen name is a great easement of the soul.

It reminds me of an occasion on which I was climbing with a famous rock climber. I do not mind confessing (over my pen name) that I am not good on rocks. My companion on the rope kept addressing

me at critical moments by the name of Saunders. My name, I rejoice to say, is not Saunders, and he knew it was not Saunders, but he had to call me something, and in the excitement of the moment could think of nothing but Saunders. Whenever I was slow in finding a handhold or foothold, there would come a stentorian instruction to Saunders to feel to the right or the left, or higher up or lower down. And I remember that I found it a great comfort to know that it was not I who was so slow, but that fellow Saunders. I seemed to see him as a laborious, futile person who would have been better employed at home looking after his hens. And so in these articles, I seem again to be impersonating the ineffable Saunders, of whom I feel at liberty to speak plainly. I see before me a long vista of self-revelations, the real title of which ought to be "The Showing Up of Saunders."

But to return to the subject. This train-fever is, of course, only a symptom. It proceeds from that apprehensiveness of mind that is so common and incurable an affliction. The complaint has been very well satirised by one who suffered from it. "I have had many and severe troubles in my life," he said, "*but most of them never happened.*" That is it. We people who worry about the trains and similar things live in a world of imaginative disaster. The heavens are always going to fall on us. We look ahead, like Christian, and see the lions waiting to devour us, and when we find they are only poor imitation lions, our

timorous imagination is not set at rest, but invents other lions to scare us out of our wits.

And yet intellectually we know that these apprehensions are worthless. Experience has taught us that it is not the things we fear that come to pass, but the things of which we do not dream. The bolt comes from the blue. We take elaborate pains to guard our face, and get a thump in the small of the back. We propose to send the fire-engine to Ulster, and turn to see Europe in flames. Cowper put the case against all "fearful saints" (and sinners) when he said:

The clouds ye so much dread  
Are big with mercy, and will break  
With blessings on your head.

It is the clouds you don't dread that swamp you. Cowper knew, for he too was an apprehensive mortal, and it is only the apprehensive mortal who really knows the full folly of his apprehensiveness.

Now, save once, I have never lost a train in my life. The exception was at Calais when the Brussels express did, in defiance of the time-table, really give me and others the slip, carrying with it my bag containing my clothes and the notes of a most illuminating lecture. I chased that bag all through Northern France and Belgium, inquiring at wayside stations, wiring to junctions, hunting among the mountains of luggage at Lille. It was at Lille that—— But the train is slowing down. There is the slope of the hill-

side, black against the night sky, and among the trees I see the glimmer of a light beckoning me as the lonely lamp in Greenhead Ghyll used to beckon Wordsworth's Michael. The night is full of stars, the landscape glistens with a late frost: it will be a jolly two miles' tramp to that beacon on the hill.

## ✓ ON THE DOWNS

WE spread our lunch on the crown of one of those great billows of the downs that stand along the sea. Down in the hollows tiny villages or farmsteads stood in the midst of clumps of trees, and the cultivated lands looked like squares of many-coloured carpets, brown carpets and yellow carpets and green carpets, with the cloud shadows passing over them and moving up the gracious slopes of the downs beyond, like the breath of the wind on the face of the waters. A gleam of white in the midst of one of the brown fields caught the eye. It seemed like a patch of snow that had survived the rigours of the English summer, but suddenly it rose as if blown by the wind and came towards us in tiny flakes of white that turned to seagulls. They sailed high above us uttering that querulous cry that seems to have in it all the unsatisfied hunger of the sea.

In this splendid spaciousness the familiar forms seem incredibly diminutive. That little speck moving across one of the brown carpets is a blough-



man and his team. That white stream that looks like milk flowing over the green carpet is a flock of sheep running before the sheep-dog to another pasture. And the ear no less than the eye learns to translate the faint suggestions into known terms. At first it seems that, save for the larks that spring up here and there with their cascades of song, the whole of this immense vacancy is soundless. But listen. There is "the wind on the heath, brother." And below that, and only audible when you have attuned your ear to the silence, is the low murmur of the sea.

You begin to grow interested in probing the secrecies of this great stillness. That? Ah, that was the rumble of some distant railway train going to Brighton or Eastbourne. But what was that? Through the voices of the wind and the sea that we have learned to distinguish we catch another sound, curiously hollow and infinitely remote, not vaguely pervasive like the murmur of the sea, but round and precise like the beating of a drum somewhere on the confines of the earth.

"The guns!"

Yes, the guns. Across fifty miles of sea and fifty miles of land the sound is borne to us as we sit in the midst of this great peace of earth and sky. When once detached, as it were, from the vague murmurs of the breathing air it becomes curiously insistent. It throbs on the ear almost like the beating of a pulse—baleful, sepulchral, like the strokes of doom.

We begin counting them, wondering whether they are the guns of the enemy or our own, speculating as to the course of the battle.

We have become spectators of the great tragedy, and the throb of the guns touches the scene with new suggestions. Those cloud shadows drifting across the valley and up the slopes of the downs on the other side take on the shapes of massed battalions. The apparent solitude does not destroy the impression. There is no solitude so complete to the outward eye as that which broods over the country when the armies face each other in the grips of death. I have looked from the mountain of Rheims across just such a valley as this. Twenty miles of battle front lay before me, and in all that great field of vision there was not a moving thing visible. There were no cattle in the fields and no ploughmen following their teams. Roads marched across the landscape, but they were empty roads. It was as though life had vanished from the earth. Yet I knew that all over that great valley the earth was crawling with life and full of immense and sinister secrecies—the galleries of the sappers, the trenches and redoubts, the hiding-places of great guns, the concealed observations of the watchers. Yes, it was just such a scene as this. The only difference was that you had not to put your ear to the ground to catch the thunder of the guns.

But the voice of war that has broken in upon our peace fades when we are once more on the move

over the downs, and the visions it has brought with it seem unreal and phantasmal in their serene and sunlit world. The shadows turn to mere shadows again, and we tread the wild thyme and watch the spiral of the lark with careless rapture. We dip down into a valley to a village hidden among the trees, without fear or thought of bomb-proof shelters and masked batteries, and there in a cottage with the roses over the porch we take rest and counsel over the teacups. Then once more on to the downs. The evening shadows are stretching across the valleys, but on these spacious heights the sunshine still rests. Some one starts singing that jolly old song, "The Farmer's Boy," and soon the air resounds to the chorus:

To plough and sow, to reap and mow,  
And be a farmer's boy-o-o-o-oy,  
And be a farmer's boy.

No one recalls the throbbing of the guns or to catch it from amidst the murmurs of the air. This—this is the reality. That was only an echo from a bad dream from which we have awakened.

And when an hour or two later we reach the little village by the sea we rush for the letters that await us with eager curiosity. There is silence in the room as each of us devours the budget of news awaiting us. I am vaguely conscious as I read that some one has left the room with a sense of haste. I go up to my bedroom, and when I return the sitting-

room is empty save for one figure. I see at a glance that something has happened.

"Robert has been killed in battle," he says.

How near the sound of the guns had come!

### ON A TOP-HAT

A FEW days ago I went to a christening to make vows on behalf of the offspring of a gallant young officer now at the front. I conceived that the fitting thing on such an occasion was to wear a silk hat, and accordingly I took out the article, warmed it before the fire, and rubbed it with a hat pad until it was nice and shiny, put it on my head, and set out for the church. But I soon regretted the choice. It had no support from any one else present, and when later I got out of the Tube and walked down the Strand I found that I was a conspicuous person, which, above all things, I hate to be. My hat, I saw, was observed. Eyes were turned towards me with that mild curiosity with which one remarks any innocent oddity or vanity of the streets.

I became self-conscious and looked around for companionship, but as my eye travelled along the crowded pavement I could see nothing but bowlers and trilbys and occasional straws. "Ah, here at last," said I, "is one coming." But a nearer view only completed my discomfiture, for it was one of those greasy-shiny hats which go with frayed trousers

and broken boots, and which are the symbol of "better days," of hopes that are dead, and "drinks" that dally, of a social status that has gone and of a suburban villa that has shrunk to a cubicle in a Rowton lodging-house. I looked at greasy-hat and greasy-hat looked at me, and in that momentary glance of fellowship we agreed that we were "out of it."

I put my silk hat away at night with the firm resolution that nothing short of an invitation to Buckingham Palace, or some similar incredible disaster, should make me drag it into the light again. For the truth is that the war has given the top-hat a knock-out blow. It had been tottering on our brows for some time. There was a very hot summer a few years ago which began the revolution. The tyranny of the top-hat became intolerable, and quite "respectable" people began to be seen in the street with Panamas and straws. But these were only concessions to an irresponsible climate, and the silk hat still held its ancient sway as the crown and glory of our City civilisation. And now it has toppled down and is on the way, perhaps, to becoming as much a thing of the past as wigs or knee-breeches. It is almost as rare in the Strand as it is in Market Street, Manchester. Cabinet Ministers and other sublime personages still wear it, coachmen still wear it, and my friend greasy-hat still wears it; but for the rest of us it is a splendour that is past, a memory of the world before the deluge.

It may be that it will revive. It would not be the first time that such a result of a great catastrophe was found to be only temporary. I remember that Pepys records in his Diary that one result of the Great Plague was that the wig went out of fashion. People were afraid to wear wigs that might be made of the hair of those who had died of infection. But the wig returned again for more than a century, though you may remember that in *The Rivals* there is an early hint of its final disappearance. There was never probably a more crazy fashion, and, like most crazy fashions, it began, as the "Alexandra limp" of our youth began, in snobbery. Was it not the fact that a bald-headed King wore a wig to conceal his baldness, which set all the funkey-world wearing wigs to conceal their hair? This aping of the great is always converting some defect or folly into a virtue. When Lady Percy in *Henry IV.* is lamenting Hotspur she says:

... he was, indeed, the glass  
Wherein the noble youth did dress themselves.  
He had no legs that practised not his gait;  
And speaking thick, which nature made his blemish,  
Became the accents of the valiant;  
For those that could speak low and tardily,  
Would turn their own perfection to abuse,  
To seem like him.

In the case of the top-hat the disappearance is due to the psychology of the war. The great tragedy has brought us down to the bed-rock of things and

has made us feel somehow that ornament is out of place, and that the top-hat is a falsity in a world that has become a battlefield. I don't think women have shared this feeling to the same extent. I am told there were never so many sealskin coats to be seen as during last winter. But, perhaps, the women will say that men have been only too glad to use the war as an excuse for getting rid of an incubus. And they may be right. We had better not make too great a virtue of what is, after all, a comfortable change. Let us enjoy it without boasting.

Our enjoyment may be short-lived. We must not be surprised if this incredible hat returns in triumph with peace. It has survived the blasts of many centuries and infinite changes of fashion. It is, I suppose, the most ancient survival in the dress that men wear. There is in the Froissart collection at the British Museum an illumination (dating from the fifteenth century) showing the expedition of the French and English against the Barbary corsairs. And there seated in the boats are men clad in armour. They have put their helmets aside and are wearing top-hats! And it may be that when Macaulay's New Zealander, centuries hence, takes his seat on that broken arch of London Bridge to sketch the ruins of St. Paul's, he will sit under the shelter of a top-hat that has outlasted all our greatness.

There must be some virtue in a thing that is so immortal. If the doctrine of the survival of the fittest applies to dress, it is the fittest thing we have.

Trousers are a thing of yesterday with us, but our top-hat carries us back to the Wars of the Roses and beyond. It is not its beauty that explains it. I have never heard any one deny that it is ugly, though custom may have blunted our sense of its ugliness. It is not its utility. I have never heard any one claim that this strange cylinder had that quality. It is not its comfort. It is stiff, it is heavy, it is unmanageable in a wind and ruined by a shower of rain. It needs as much attention as a peevish child or a pet dog. It is not even cheap, and when it is disreputable it is the most disreputable thing on earth. What is the mystery of its strange persistence? Is it simply a habit that we cannot throw off or is there a certain snobbishness about it that appeals to the funkeyism of men? That is perhaps the explanation. That is perhaps why it has disappeared when snobbishness is felt to be inconsistent with the world of stern realities and bitter sorrows in which we live. We are humble and serious and out of humour with the pretentious vanity of our top-hat.

## IN PRAISE OF WALKING

I STARTED out the other day from Keswick with a rucksack on my back, a Baddeley in my pocket, and a companion by my side. I like a companion when I go a-walking. "Give me a companion by



the way," said Sterne, "if it be only to remark how the shadows lengthen as the sun declines." That is about enough. You do not want a talkative person. Walking is an occupation in itself. You may give yourself up to chatter at the beginning, but when you are warmed to the job you are disposed to silence, drop perhaps one behind the other, and reserve your talk for the inn table and the after-supper pipe. An occasional joke, an occasional stave of song, a necessary consultation over the map—that is enough for the way.

At the head of the Lake we got in a boat and rowed across Derwentwater to the tiny bay at the foot of Catbells. There we landed, shouldered our burdens, and set out over the mountains and the passes, and for a week we enjoyed the richest solitude this country can offer. We followed no cut-and-dried programme. I love to draw up programmes for a walking tour, but I love still better to break them. For one of the joys of walking is the sense of freedom it gives you. You are tied to no time-table, the slave of no road, the tributary of no man. If you like the road you follow it; if you choose the pass that is yours also; if your fancy (and your wind) is for the mountain tops, then over Great Gable and Scawfell, Robinson and Helvellyn be your way. Every short cut is for you, and every track is the path of adventure. The stream that tumbles down the mountain side is your wine cup. You kneel on the boulders, bend your head, and take such draughts as only the

healthy thirst of the mountains can give. And then on your way again singing:

Bed in the bush with the stars to see,  
Bread I dip in the river—  
There's the life for a man like me,  
There's the life for ever.

What liberty is there like this? You have cut your moorings from the world, you are far from telegraphs and newspapers and all the frenzies of the life you have left behind you, you are alone with the lonely hills and the wide sky and the elemental things that have been from the beginning and will outlast all the tortured drama of men. The very sounds of life—the whistle of the curlew, the bleating of the mountain sheep—add to the sense of primeval solitude. To these sounds the crags have echoed for a thousand and ten thousand years; to these sounds and to the rushing of the winds and the waters they will echo ten thousand years hence. It is as though you have passed out of time into eternity, where a thousand years are as one day. There is no calendar for this dateless world. The buzzard that you have startled from its pool in the gully and that circles round with wide-flapping wings has a lineage as ancient as the hills, and the vision of the pikes of Langdale that bursts on you as you reach the summit of Esk Hause is the same vision that burst on the first savage who adventured into these wild fastnesses of the mountains.

And then as the sun begins to slope to the west

you remember that, if you are among immortal things, you are only a mortal yourself, that you are getting footsore, and that you need a night's lodging and the comforts of an inn. Whither shall we turn? The valleys call us on every side. Newlands' wide vale we can reach, or cheerful Borrowdale, or lonely Ennerdale, or—yes, to-night we will sup at Wastdale, at the jolly old inn that Auld Will Ritson used to keep, that inn sacred to the cragsman, where on New Year's Eve the gay company of climbers foregather from their brave deeds on the mountains and talk of hand-holds and foot-holds and sing the song of "The rope, the rope," and join in the chorus as the landlord trolls out:

I'm not a climber, not a climber,  
Not a climber now,  
My weight is going fourteen stone—  
I'm not a climber now.

We shall not find Gaspard there to-night—Gaspard, the gay and intrepid guide from the Dauphiné, beloved of all who know the lonely inn at Wastdale. He is away on the battle-field fighting a sterner foe than the rocks and precipices of Great Gable and Scawfell. But Old Joe, the shepherd, will be there—old Joe, who has never been in a train or seen a town and whose special glory is that he can pull uglier faces than any man in Cumberland. He will not pull them for anybody—only when he is in a good humour and for his cronies in the back

parlour. To-night, perchance, we shall see his eyes roll as he roars out the chorus of "D'ye ken John Peel?" Yes, Wastdale shall be to-night's halt. And so over Black Sail, and down the rough mountain side to the inn whose white-washed walls hail us from afar out of the gathering shadows of the valley.

To-morrow? Well, to-morrow shall be as to-day. We will shoulder our rucksacks early, and be early on the mountains, for the first maxim in going a journey is the early start. Have the whip-hand of the day, and then you may loiter as you choose. If it is hot, you may bathe in the chill waters of those tarns that lie bare to the eye of heaven in the hollows of the hills—tarns with names of beauty and waters of such crystal purity as Killarney knows not. And at night we will come through the clouds down the wild course of Rosset Ghyll and sup and sleep in the hotel hard by Dungeon Ghyll, or, perchance, having the day well in hand, we will push on by Blea Tarn and Yewdale to Coniston, or by Easedale Tarn to Grasmere, and so to the Swan at the foot of Dunmail Raise. For we must call at the Swan. Was it not the Swan that Wordsworth's "Waggoner" so triumphantly passed? Was it not the Swan to which Sir Walter Scott used to go for his beer when he was staying with Wordsworth at Rydal Water? And behind the Swan is there not that fold in the hills where Wordsworth's "Michael" built, or tried to build, his sheepfold? Yes, we will stay at the Swan whatever befalls.

And so the jolly days go by, some wet, some fine, some a mixture of both, but all delightful, and we forget the day of the week, know no news except the changes in the weather and the track over the mountains, meet none of our kind except a rare vagabond like ourselves—with rope across his shoulder if he is a rock-man, with rucksack on back if he is a tourist—and with no goal save some far-off valley inn where we shall renew our strength and where the morrow's uprising to deeds shall be sweet.

I started to write in praise of walking, and I find I have written in praise of Lakeland. But indeed the two chants of praise are a single harmony, for I have written in vain if I have not shown that the way to see the most exquisite cabinet of beauties in this land is by the humble path of the pedestrian. He who rides through Lakeland knows nothing of its secrets, has tasted of none of its magic.

### ON A HAWTHORN HEDGE

As I turned into the lane that climbs the hillside to the cottage under the high beech woods I was conscious of a sort of mild expectation that I could not explain. It was late evening. Venus, who looks down with such calm splendour upon this troubled earth in these summer nights, had disappeared, but the moon had not yet risen. The air was heavy with those rich odours which seem so much more pungent

by night than by day—those odours of summer eves that Keats has fixed for ever in the imagination:

I cannot see what flowers are at my feet,  
Nor what soft incense hangs upon the boughs;  
But, in embalmed darkness, guess each sweet  
Wherewith the seasonable month endows  
The grass, the thicket, and the fruit-tree wild;  
White hawthorn . . .

Ah, that was it. I remembered now. A fortnight ago, when I last came up this lane by night, it was the flash of the white hawthorn in the starlight that burst upon me with such a sudden beauty. I knew the spot. It was just beyond here, where the tall hedgerow leans over the grass side-track and makes a green harbour by the wayside. I should come to it in a minute or two, and catch once more that ecstasy of spring.

And when I reached the spot the white hawthorn had vanished. The harbour was there, but its glory had faded. The two weeks I had spent in Fleet Street had stripped it of its crown, and the whole pageant of the year must pass before I could again experience that sudden delight of the hedgerow bursting into foam. I do not mind confessing that I continued my way up the lane with something less than my former exhilaration. Partly no doubt this was due to the fact that the hill at this point begins its job of climbing in earnest and is a stiff pull at the end of a long day's work and a tiresome journey—especially if you are carrying a bag.

But the real reason of the slight shadow that had fallen on my spirit was the vanished hawthorn. Poor sentimentalist, you say, to cherish these idle fancies in this stern world of blood and tears. Well, perhaps it is this stern world of blood and tears that gives these idle fancies their poignancy. Perhaps it is through those fancies that one feels the transitoriness of other things. The coming and the parting in the round of nature are so wonderfully mingled that we can never be quite sure whether the joy of the one triumphs over the regret for the other. It is always "Hail" and "Farewell" in one breath. I heard the cuckoo calling across the meadows to-day, and already I noticed a faltering in his second note. Soon the second note will be silent altogether, and the single call will sound over the valley like the curfew bell of spring.

Who, I thought, would not fix these fleeting moments of beauty if he could? Who would not keep the cuckoo's twin shout floating for ever over summer fields and the blackbird for ever fluting his thanksgiving after summer showers? Who can see the daffodils nodding their heads in sprightly dance without sharing the mood of Herrick's immortal lament that that dance should be so brief:

Fair daffodils, we weep to see  
You haste away so soon;  
As yet the early-rising sun  
Has not attain'd its noon.  
Stay, stay,

Until the hasting day  
Has run  
But to the evensong;  
And, having prayed together, we  
Will go with you along.

Yes, I think Herrick would have forgiven me for that momentary lapse into regretfulness over the white hawthorn. He would have understood. You will see that he understood if you will recall the second stanza, which, if you are the person I take you for, you will do without needing to turn to a book.

It is the same sense of the transience of beauty that inspired the *Ode to a Grecian Urn* on which pastoral beauty was fixed in eternal rapture:

Ah, happy, happy boughs! that cannot shed  
Your leaves, nor ever bid the spring adieu.

And there we touch the paradox of this strange one. We would keep the fleeting beauty of Nature, and yet we would not keep it. The thought of those trees whose leaves are never shed, and of that eternal spring to which we never bid adieu, is pleasant to toy with, but after all we would not have it so. It is no more seriously tenable than the thought that little Johnny there should remain for ever at the age of ten. You may feel that you would like him to remain at the age of ten. Indeed you are a strange parent if you do not look back a little wistfully to the childhood of your children, and wish you could see them as you once saw them. But you



would not really have Johnny stick at ten. After five years of the experience you would wish little Johnny dead. For life and its beauty are a living thing, and not a pretty fancy sculptured on a Grecian urn.

And so with the pageant of Nature. If the pageant stopped, the wonder itself would stop. I should have no sudden shock of delight at hearing the first call of the cuckoo in spring or seeing my hawthorn hedge burst into snowy blossoms. I should no longer remark the jolly clatter of the rooks in the February trees which forms the prologue of spring, nor look out for the coming of the first primrose or the arrival of the first swallow. I should cease, it is true, to have the pangs of "Farewell," but I should cease also to have the ecstasy of "Hail." I should have my Grecian urn, but I should have lost the magic of the living world.

By the time I had reached the gate I had buried my regrets for the vanished hawthorn. I knew that to-morrow I should find new miracles in the hedgerows—the wild rose and the honeysuckle, and after them the blackberries, and after these again the bright-hued hips and haws. And though the cuckoo's note should fail him, there would remain the thrush, and after the thrush that constant little fellow in the red waistcoat would keep the song going through the dark winter days.

## ON POCKETS AND THINGS

I SUPPOSE most men felt, as I felt, the reasonableness of Mr. Justice Bray's remarks the other day on the preference of women for bags instead of pockets. A case was before him in which a woman had gone into a shop, had put down her satchel containing her money and valuables, turned to pick it up a little later, found it had been stolen, and thereupon brought an action against the owners of the shop for the recovery of her losses. The jury were unsympathetic, found that in the circumstances the woman was responsible, and gave a verdict against her.

• Of course the jury were men, all of them prejudiced on this subject of pockets. At a guess I should say that there were not fewer than 150 pockets in that jury-box, *and not one satchel*. You, madam, may retort that this is only another instance of the scandal of this man-ridden world. Why were there no women in that jury-box? Why are all the decisions of the courts, from the High Court to the coroner's court, left to the judgment of men? Madam, I share your indignation. I would "comb-out" the jury-box. I would send half the jurymen, if not into the trenches, at least to hoe turnips, and fill their places with a row of women. Women are just as capable as men of forming an opinion about facts, they have at least as much time to spare, and their point of view is as essential to justice. What can

there be more ridiculous, for example, than a jury of men sitting for a whole day to decide the question of the cut of a gown without a single woman's expert opinion to guide them, or more unjust than to leave an issue between a man and a woman entirely in the hands of men? Yes, certainly madam, I am with you on the general question.

But when we come to the subject of pockets, I am bound to confess that I am with the jury. If I had been on that jury I should have voted with fervour for making the woman responsible for her own loss. If it were possible for women to put their satchels down on counters, or the seats of buses, or any odd place they thought of, and then to make some innocent person responsible because they were stolen, there would be no security for anybody. It would be a travesty of justice—a premium upon recklessness and even fraud. Moreover, people who won't wear pockets deserve to be punished. They ask for trouble and ought not to complain when they get it.

I have never been able to fathom the obduracy of women in this matter of pockets. It is not the only reflection upon their common-sense which is implicit in their dress. If we were to pass judgment on the relative intelligence of the sexes by their codes of costume, sanity would pronounce overwhelmingly in favour of men. Imagine a man who buttoned his coat and waistcoat down the back, so that he was dependent on someone else to help him to dress in the morning and unfasten him at night,

or who relied on such abominations as hooks-and-eyes scattered over unattainable places, in order to keep his garments in position. You cannot imagine such a man. Yet women submit to these incredible tyrannies of fashion without a murmur, and talk about them as though it was the hand of fate upon them. I have a good deal of sympathy with the view of a friend of mine who says that no woman ought to have the vote until she has won the enfranchisement of her own buttons.

Or take high-heeled boots. Is there any sight more ludicrous than the spectacle of a woman stumbling along on a pair of high heels, flung out of the perpendicular and painfully struggling to preserve her equilibrium, condemned to take finicking little steps lest she should topple over, all the grace and freedom of movement lost in an ugly acrobatic feat? And when the feet turn in, and the high heels turn over—heavens! I confess I never see high heels without looking for a mindless face, and I rarely look in vain.

But the puzzle about the pockets is that quite sensible women go about in a pocketless condition. I turned to Mrs. Alpha just now—she was sitting by the fire knitting—and asked how many pockets she had when she was fully dressed. “None,” she said. “Pockets haven’t been worn for years and years, but now they are coming in—in an ornamental way.” “In an ornamental way,” said I. “Won’t they carry anything?” “Well, you can trust a

handkerchief to them." "Not a purse?" "Good gracious, no. It would simply ask to be stolen, and if it wasn't stolen in five minutes it would fall out in ten." The case was stranger than I had thought. Not to have pockets was bad enough; but to have sham pockets! Think of it! We have been at war for three and a half years, and women are now beginning to wear pockets "in an ornamental way," not for use but as a pretty fal-lal, much as they might put on another row of useless buttons to button nothing. And what is the result? Mrs. Alpha (I have full permission to mention her in order to give actuality to this moral discourse) spends hours looking for her glasses, for her keys, for the letter that came this morning, for her purse, for her bag, for all that is hers. And we, the devoted members of her family, spend hours in looking for them too, exploring dark corners, probing the interstices of sofas and chairs, rummaging the dishevelled drawers anew, discovering the thing that disappeared so mysteriously last week or last month and that we no longer want, but rarely the article that is the very hub of the immediate wheel of things.

Now, I am different. I am pockets all over. I am simply agape with pockets. I am like a pillar-box walking about, waiting for the postman to come and collect things. All told, I carry sixteen pockets—none of them ornamental, every one as practical as a time-table—pockets for letters, for watch, for keys, for handkerchiefs, for tickets, for spectacles

(two pairs, long and short distance), for loose money, for note-wallet, for diary and pocket-book—why, bless me, you can hardly mention a thing I haven't a pocket for. And I would not do without one of them, madam—not one. Do I never lose things? Of course I lose things. I lose them in my pockets. You can't possibly have as many pockets as I have got without losing things in them. But then you have them all the time.

That is the splendid thing about losing your property in your own pockets. It always turns up in the end, and that lady's satchel left on the counter will never turn up. And think of the surprises you get when rummaging in your pockets—the letters you haven't answered, the bills you haven't paid, the odd money that has somehow got into the wrong pocket. When I have nothing else to do I just search my pockets—all my pockets, those in the brown suit, and the grey suit, and the serge suit, and my "Sunday best"—there must be fifty pockets in all, and every one of them full of something, of ghosts of engagements I haven't kept, and duties I haven't performed, and friends I have neglected, of pipes that I have mourned as lost, and half packets of cigarettes that by some miracle I have not smoked, and all the litter of a casual and disorderly life. I would not part with these secrets for all the satchels in Oxford Street. I am my own book of mysteries. I bulge with mysteries. I can surprise myself at any moment I like by simply exploring my pockets.

If I avoid exploring them I know I am not very well. I know I am not in a condition to face the things that I might find there. I just leave them there till I am stronger—not lost, madam, as they would be in your satchel, but just forgotten, comfortably forgotten. Why should one always be disturbing the sleeping dogs in the kennels of one's pockets? Why not let them sleep? Are there not enough troubles in life that one must go seeking them in one's own pockets? And I have a precedent, look you. Did not Napoleon say that if you did not look at your letters for a fortnight you generally found that they had answered themselves?

And may I not in this connection recall the practice of Sir Andrew Clarke, the physician of Mr. Gladstone, as recorded in the reminiscences of Mr. Henry Holiday? At dinner one night Sir Andrew was observed to be drinking champagne and was asked why he allowed himself an indulgence which he so rigorously denied to his patients. "Yes," he said, "but you do not understand my case. When I go from here I shall find a pile of fifty or sixty letters awaiting answers." "But will champagne help you to answer them?" asked the other. "Not at all," said Sir Andrew, "not at all; but it puts you in the frame of mind in which you don't care a damn whether they are answered or not." I do not offer this story for the imitation of youth but for the solace of people like myself who have long reached the years of discretion without becoming discreet and who

like to feel that their weaknesses have been shared by the eminent and the wise.

And, to conclude, the wisdom of the pocket habit is not to be judged by its abuse, but by its obvious convenience and safety. I trust that some energetic woman will be moved to inaugurate a crusade for the redemption of her sex from its pocketless condition. A Society for the Propagation of Pockets Among Women (S.P.P.A.W.) is a real need of the time. It should be a part of the great work of after-the-war reconstruction. It should organise opinion, distribute leaflets and hold meetings, with the Mayor in the chair and experts, rich in pockets and the lore of the subject, to light the fire of rebellion throughout the land. Women have won the vote from the tyrant man. Let them win their pockets from the tyrant dressmaker.

### ON A DISTANT VIEW OF A PIG

Yes, I would certainly keep a pig. The idea came to me while I was digging. I find that there is no occupation that stimulates thought more than digging if you choose your soil well. Digging in the London clay does not stimulate thought; it deadens thought. It is good exercise for the body, but it is no exercise for the mind. You can't play with your fancies as you plunge your spade into this stiff and stubborn medium. But in the light, porous soil of my garden on the chalk hills digging goes with a



swing and a rhythm that set the thoughts singing like the birds. I feel I could win battles when I'm digging, or write plays or lyrics that would stun the world, or make speeches that would stir a post to action. Ideas seem as plentiful as blackberries in autumn, and if only I could put down the spade and capture them red-hot I feel that I could make *The Star* simply blaze with glory.

It was in one of these prolific moments that I thought of the pig. Like all great ideas there was something inevitable about it. The calculations of Le Verrier and Adams proved the existence of Neptune before that orb was discovered. They knew it was there before they found it. My pig was born without my knowledge. In the furnace of my mind he took shape merely by the friction of facts. He was a sort of pig by divine right. It happened thus. In the midst of my digging Jim Squire, passing up the lane, had paused on the other side of the hedge to discuss last night's frost. I straightened my back for a talk, and naturally we talked about potatoes. If you want to get the best out of Jim Squire you must touch him on potatoes. There are some people who find Jim an unresponsive and suspicious yokel. That is because they do not know how to draw him out. Mention potatoes, or carrots, or the best way of dealing with slugs, or the right manure for a hot-bed, or any sensible subject like these, and he simply flows with wisdom and urbanity.

He observed that I should have a tidy few potatoes,

what with the garden I was digging, *and* the piece I'd turned over in the orchard, *and* that there bit o' waste land on the hillside which he *had* heard as I was getting Mestur Wistock to plough up for me. Yes, there'd be a niceish lot. And he *did* hear I was going to set King Edwards and Arran Chiefs. Rare and fine potatoes they were too. He had some King Edwards last year—turned out wonderful, they did. One root he pulled up weighed 12 lb. Yes, Miss Mary weighed 'em for him in the scale at the farm—just for a hobby like as you might say. It was like this. He'd seen a bit in the paper about a man as had 8 lb. on a root, and he (Jim) said to himself, "This root beats that by a long chalk *I* know." And Miss Mary come by and she said she'd weigh 'em. And she did. And it was 12 lb. full, she said. If anything, she said, 'twas a shade over. *She* said as they'd have took a prize anywhere—that's what *she* said. . . . Well, you couldn't have too many potatoes these days. Wonderful good food they were, for man *and* pig. . . .

As he went on up the lane my spade took up that word like a refrain. At every rhythmic stroke it seemed to cry "pig" with increasing vehemence.

Then felt I like some watcher of the skies,  
When a new planet swims into his ken.

A pig? Why not?—and I straightened my back again. I felt that something prodigious was taking shape. My eye wandered across the orchard. There

were the hives standing in a row—three of them, to be increased to twelve as fast as the expert, who has set up her carpenter's shop in the barn, can get the parts to put together. And beyond the hives three sheds—one for poultry, one for the hotbed for mushrooms, the third—why, the very thing. . . . Concrete the floor and it would be a very palace for a pig.

I took a turn up the garden to look this thing resolutely in the face, and at the gate I saw the farmer's wife coming down the lane. We stopped, and she talked about her cows and about an order she had got from the Government to plough up more pasture, and then—as if echoing the very thought that was drumming in my head—about the litter of pigs she was expecting and of her wish to get the cottagers to keep pigs. Why, this was a very conspiracy of circumstance, thought I. It seemed as though man and events alike were engaged in a plot to make me keep a pig.

With an air of idle curiosity I encouraged the farmer's wife to talk on the thrilling theme, and she responded with enthusiasm. The pig, I found, was a grossly maligned animal. It had lain uncomplainingly under imputations that were foul slanders on its innocent and lovable character. Yes, lovable. She had had pigs who were as affectionate as any dog—pigs that followed her about in sheer friendliness. And as for the charge of filthiness, who was to blame? We gave them dirty styres and then

called them dirty pigs. But the pig was a clean animal, loved cleanliness, thrived on cleanliness. It was man the dirty who kept the pig foul and then called him unclean. And what a profitable animal. She had had a sow which had produced 108 pigs and 102 of them came to maturity. What an example to Shoreditch, I said. Perhaps they don't give them clean styes in Shoreditch, she said. No, I replied, they give them dirty styes. . . .

I went indoors, suffused with the vision of the transfigured pig, the affectionate, cleanly, intelligent pig, and took up a paper, and the first thing my eye encountered was an article on "The Cottager's Pig." I read it with the frenzy of a new religion and rose filled to the brim with lore about the animal to whose existence (except in the shape of bacon) I had been indifferent so long. And now, fully seized with the idea, it seemed that the world talked of nothing but pig. It was only that my ears were unstopped and my eyes unsealed by an awakened curiosity; but it seemed to me that the pig had suddenly been born into the universe, and that the air was filled with the rumour of his coming. I encountered the subject at every turn. In the *Times* I read a touching lament over the disappearance of the little black pig. Elsewhere I saw a facsimile letter from Lord Rhonda, in which he declared his loyalty to the pig and denied that he had ever spoken evil of him.

It was a patriotic duty to keep a pig. He was an ally in the war. I saw the whole German General

Staff turning pale at his name, as Mazarin was said to turn pale at the name of Cromwell. Arriving in town I met that eminent politician Mr. R—— and he began to tell me how he had started all his cottagers in the North growing pig. By nightfall I could have held my own without shame or discredit in any company of pig dealers, and in my dreams I saw the great globe itself resting on the back, not of an elephant, but of a pig with a beautiful curly tail.

. . . . .

Later: I have ordered the pig.

### ON A VANISHED GARDEN

I WAS walking with a friend along the Spaniards Road the other evening, talking on the inexhaustible theme of these days, when he asked: "What is the biggest thing that has happened to this country as the outcome of the war?"

"It is within two or three hundred yards from here," I replied. "Come this way and I'll show it to you."

He seemed a little surprised, but accompanied me cheerfully enough as I turned from the road and led him through the gorse and the trees towards Parliament Fields, until we came upon a large expanse of allotments, carved out of the great playground, and alive with figures, men, women, and children, some earthing up potatoes, some weeding onion beds, some thinning out carrots, some merely walking

along the patches and looking at the fruits of their labour springing from the soil. "There," I said, "is the most important result of the war."

He laughed, but not contemptuously. He knew what I meant, and I think he more than half agreed.

And I think you will agree, too, if you will consider what that stretch of allotments means. It is the symptom of the most important revival, the greatest spiritual awakening this country has seen for generations. Wherever you go that symptom meets you. Here in Hampstead allotments are as plentiful as blackberries in autumn. A friend of mine who lives in Beckenham tells me there are fifteen hundred in his parish. In the neighbourhood of London there must be many thousands. In the country as a whole there must be hundreds of thousands. If dear old Joseph Fels could revisit the glimpses of the moon and see what is happening, see the vacant lots and waste spaces bursting into onion beds and potato patches, what joy would be his! He was the fore-runner of the revival, the passionate pilgrim of the Vacant Lot; but his hot gospel fell on deaf ears, and he died just before the trumpet of war awakened the sleeper.

Do not suppose that the greatness of this thing that is happening can be measured in terms of food. That is important, but it is not the most important thing. The allotment movement will add appreciably to our food supplies, but it will add far more to the spiritual resources of the nation. It is the

beginning of a war on the disease that is blighting our people. What is wrong with us? What is the root of our social and spiritual ailment? Is it not the divorce of the people from the soil? For generations the wholesome red blood of the country has been sucked into the great towns, and we have seen grow up a vast machine of industry that has made slaves of us, shut out the light of the fields from our lives, left our children to grow like weeds in the slums, rootless and waterless, poisoned the healthy instincts of nature implanted in us, and put in their place the rank growths of the streets. Can you walk through a London working-class district or a Lancashire cotton town, with their huddle of airless streets, without a feeling of despair coming over you at the sense of this enormous perversion of life into the arid channels of death? Can you take pride in an Empire on which the sun never sets when you think of the courts in which, as Will Crooks says, the sun never rises?

And now the sun is going to rise. We have started a revolution that will not end until the breath of the earth has come back to the soul of the people. The tyranny of the machine is going to be broken. The dead hand is going to be lifted from the land. Yes, you say, but these people that I see working on the allotments are not the people from the courts and the slums; but professional men, the superior artisan, and so on. That is true. But the movement must get hold of the *intelligenza* first. The

important thing is that the breach in the prison is made: the fresh air is filtering in; the idea is born—not still-born, but born a living thing. It is a way of salvation that will not be lost, and that all will traverse.

This is not mere dithyrambic enthusiasm. Take a man out of the street and put him in a garden, and you have made a new creature of him. I have seen the miracle again and again. I know a bus conductor, for example, outwardly the most ordinary of his kind. But one night I touched the key of his soul, mentioned allotments, and discovered that this man was going about his daily work irradiated by the thought of his garden triumphs. He had got a new purpose in life. He had got the spirit of the earth in his bones. It is not only the humanising influence of the garden, it is its democratising influence too.

When Adam delved and Eve span,  
Where was then the gentleman?

You can get on terms with anybody if you will discuss gardens. I know a distinguished public servant and scholar whose allotment is next to that of a bricklayer. They have become fast friends, and the bricklayer, being the better man at the job, has unconsciously assumed the role of a kindly master encouraging a well-meaning but not very competent pupil.

And think of the cleansing influence of all this. Light and air and labour—these are the medicines



not of the body only, but of the soul. It is not ponderable things alone that are found in gardens, but the great wonder of life, the peace of nature, the influences of sunsets and seasons and of all the intangible things to which we can give no name, not because they are small, but because they are outside the compass of our speech. In the great legend of the Fall the spiritual disaster of Man is symbolised by his exclusion from a garden, and the moral tragedy of modern industrialism is only the repetition of that ancient fable. Man lost his garden, and with it that tranquillity of soul that is found in gardens. He must find his way back to Eden if he is to recover his spiritual heritage, and though Eden is but a twenty-pole allotment in the midst of a hundred other twenty-pole allotments, he will find it as full of wonder and refreshment as the garden of Epicurus. He will not find much help from the God that Mr. Wells has discovered, or invented, but the God that dwells in gardens is sufficient for all our needs—let the theologians say what they will.

Not God in gardens? When the eve is cool?

Nay, but I have a sign—

'Tis very sure God walks in mine.

No one who has been a child in a garden will doubt the sign, or lose its impress through all his days. I know, for I was once a child whose world was a garden.

. . . . .

It lay a mile away from the little country town, shut out from the road by a noble hedge, so high that even Jim Berry, the giant coal-heaver, the wonder and the terror of my childhood, could not see over, so thick that no eye could peer through. It was a garden of plenty, but also a garden of the fancy, with neglected corners, rich in tangled growths and full of romantic possibilities. It was in this wilder terrain that I had found the hedgehog, here, too, had seen the glow-worm's delicate light, and here, with my brain excited by *The Story of the Hundred Days*, that I knew the Frenchmen lurked in ambush while I at the head of my gallant troop of the Black Watch was careering with magnificent courage across the open country where the potatoes and the rhubarb and the celery grew.

It was ever the Black Watch. Something in the name thrilled me. And when one day I packed a little handbag with a nightgown and started out to the town where the railway station was, it was to Scotland I was bound and the Black Watch in which I meant to enlist. It occurred to me on the road that I needed money and I returned gravely and asked my mother for half a crown. She was a practical woman and brought me back to the prose of things with arguments suitable to a very youthful mind.

The side windows of the house commanded the whole length of the garden to where at the end stood the pump whence issued delicious ice-cold water

brought up from a well so deep that you could imagine Australia to be not far from the bottom.

If only I could get to Australia! I knew it lay there under my feet with people walking along head downwards and kangaroos hopping about with their young in their pockets. It was merely a question of digging to get there. I chose a sequestered corner and worked all a summer morning with a heavy spade in the fury of this high emprise, but I only got the length of the spade on the journey and retired from the task with a sense of the bitter futility of life.

Never was there a garden more rich in fruit. Around the western wall of the house was trained a noble pear tree that flung its arms with engaging confidence right up to my bedroom window. They were hard pears that ripened only in keeping, and at Christmas melted rich and luscious in the mouth. They were kept locked up in the tool shed, but love laughs at locksmiths, and my brother found it possible to remove the lock without unlocking it by tearing out the whole staple from its socket. My father was greatly puzzled by the tendency of the pears to diminish, but he was a kindly, unsuspecting man who made no disagreeable inquiries.

Over the tool shed grew a grape vine. The roof of the shed was accessible by a filbert tree, the first of half a dozen that lined the garden on the side remote from the road. On sunny days there was no pleasanter place to lie than the top of the shed, with the grapes, small but pleasant to the thirsty palate,

ripening thick around you. A point in favour of the spot was that it was visible from no window. One could lie there and eat the fruit without annoying interruptions. G. 14554 / 36128

Equally retired was the little grass-grown path that branched off from the central gravelled path which divided the vegetable from the fruit garden. Here, by stooping down, one was hidden from prying eyes that looked from the windows by the thick rows of gooseberry bushes and raspberry canes that lined the path. It was my favourite spot, for there grew a delicious gooseberry that I counted above all gooseberries, small and hairy and yellow, with a delicate flavour that is as vivid to-day as if the forty years that lie between now and then were but a day. By this path, too, grew the greengage trees. With caution, one could safely sample the fruit, and at the worst one was sure to find some windfalls among the strawberry beds beyond the gooseberry bushes.

I loved that little grass-grown path for its seclusion as well as for its fruit. Here, with *Monte Cristo* or *Hereward the Wake*, or *The Yellow Frigate*, or a drawing-board, one could forget the tyrannies of school and all the buffets of the world. Here was the place to take one's griefs. Here it was that I wept hot tears at the news of Landseer's death—Landseer, the god of my young idolatry, whose dogs and horses, deer and birds I knew line by line through delighted imitation. It seemed on that day as though the sun had gone out of the heavens, as

though the pillars of the firmament had suddenly given way. Landseer dead! What then was the worth of living? But the wave of grief passed. I realised that the path was now clear before me. While Landseer lived I was cribbed, cabined, confined; but now—— My eyes cleared as I surveyed the magnificent horizon opening out before me. I must have room to live with this revelation. The garden was too narrow for such limitless thoughts to breathe in. I stole from the gate that led to the road by the pump and sought the wide meadows and the riverside to look this vast business squarely in the face. And for days the great secret of my future that I carried with me made the burden of a dull, unappreciative world light. Little did those who treated me as an ordinary idle boy know. Little did my elder brother, who ruled me with a rod of iron, realise that one day, when I was knighted and my pictures hung thick on the Academy walls, he would regret his harsh treatment!

But to return to the garden. The egg-plum tree had no favour in my sight. Its position was too open and palpable. And indeed I cared not for the fruit. It was too large and fleshy for my taste. But the apple trees! These were the chief glory of the garden. Winter apple trees with fruit that ripened in secret; paysin trees with fruit that ripened on the branches, fruit small with rich crimson splashes on the dark green ground; hawthorndean trees with fruit large yellow-green into which the

teeth crunched with crisp and juicy joy. There was one hawthorndean most thoughtfully situated behind the tool shed. And near by stood some props providentially placed there for domestic purposes. They were the keys with which I unlocked the treasure house.

A large quince tree grew on the other side of the hedge at the end of the garden. It threw its arms in a generous, neighbourly way over the hedge, and I knew its austere fruit well. Some of it came to me from its owner, an ancient man, "old Mr. Lake," who on summer days used to toss me largess from his abundance. The odour of a quince always brings back to me the memory of a sunny garden and a little old man over the hedge crying, "Here, my boy, catch!"

I have said nothing of that side of the garden where the vegetables grew. It was dull prose, relieved only by an occasional apple tree. The flowers in the fruit garden and by the paths were old-fashioned favourites, wallflowers and mignonette, stocks and roses. And over the garden gate grew a spreading lilac whose tassels the bold militiamen, who camped not far away, would gaily pluck as they passed on the bright May days. I did not resent it. I was proud that these brave fellows in their red coats should levy tribute on our garden. It seemed somehow to link me up with the romance of war. By the kitchen door grew an elderberry tree, whose heavy and unpleasant odour was borne for the sake

of the coming winter nights, when around the fire we sat with our hot elderberry wine and dipped our toast into the rich, steaming product of that odorous tree—nights when the winter apples came out from the chest, no longer hard and sour, but mellow and luscious as a King William pear in August, and when out in the garden all was dark and mysterious, gaunt trees standing out against the sky, where in the far distance a thin luminance told of the vast city beneath.

I passed by the old road recently, and sought the garden of my childhood. I sought in vain. A big factory had come into the little town, and workmen's dwellings had sprung up in its train. Where the garden had been there was now a school, surrounded by cottages, and children played on the doorsteps or in the little back yards, which looked on to other little back yards and cottages beyond. My garden with its noble hedge and its solitude, its companionable trees and grass-grown paths, had vanished. It was the garden of a dream.

### ON BEING CALLED THOMPSON

AMONG my letters this morning was one which annoyed me, not by its contents, but by its address. My name (for the purposes of this article) is Thomson, but my correspondent addressed me as Thompson. Now I confess I am a little sensitive about that "p." When I see it wedged in the middle of my name I

am conscious of an annoyance altogether disproportioned to the fact. I know that taken in the lump the Thompsons are as good as the Thomsons. There is not a pin to choose between us. In the beginning we were all sons of some Thomas or other, and as surnames began to develop this man called himself Thomson and that man called himself Thompson. Why he should have spatchcocked a "p" into his name I don't know. I daresay it was pride on his part, just as it is my pride not to have a "p."

Or perhaps the explanation is that offered by Fielding, the novelist. He belonged to a branch of the Earl of Denbigh's family, but the Denbighs spelt their family name Feilding. When the novelist was asked to explain the difference between the rendering of his name and theirs, he replied: "I suppose they don't know how to spell." That is probably the case of the Thompsons. They don't know how to spell.

But whatever the origin of these variations we are attached to our own forms with obstinate pride. We feel an outrage on our names as if it were an outrage on our persons. It was such an outrage that led to one of Stevenson's most angry outbursts. Some American publisher had pirated one of his books. But it was not the theft that angered him so much as the misspelling of his name. "I saw my book advertised as the work of R. L. Stephenson," he says, "and I own I boiled. It is so easy to know the name of a man whose book you have stolen, for there



it is full length on the title page of your booty. But no, damn him, not he! He calls me Stephenson." I am grateful to Stevenson for that word. It expresses my feelings about the fellow who calls me Thompson. Thompson, indeed!

I feel at this moment almost a touch of sympathy with that snob Sir Frederic Thesiger, the uncle of the first Lord Chelmsford. He was addressed one day as "Mr. Smith," and the blood of all the Thesigers (whoever they may have been) boiled within him. "Do I look like a person of the name of Smith?" he asked scornfully, and passed on. And as the blood of all the Thomsons boils within me I ask, "Do I look like a person of the name of Thompson? Now do I?" And yet I suppose one may fall as much in love with the name of Smith as with the name of Thesiger, if it happens to be one's own. I should like to try the experiment on Sir F. E. Smith. I should like to address him as Sir Frederic Thesiger and see how the blood of all the Smiths would take it.

It is, I suppose, the feeling of the loss of our identity that annoys us when people play tricks with our names. We want to be ourselves and not somebody else. We don't want to be cut off from our ancestry and the fathers that begat us. We may not know much about our ancestors, and may not care much about them. Most of us, I suppose, are in the position of Sydney Smith. "I found my neighbours," he said, "were looking up their family tree, and I

thought I would do the same, but I only got as far back as my great-grandfather, *who disappeared somewhere about the time of the Assizes.*" If we go far enough back we shall all find ancestors who disappeared about the time of the Assizes, or, still worse, ought to have disappeared and didn't. But, such as they are, we belong to them, and don't want to be confounded with those fellows the Thompsons.

And there is another reason for the annoyance. To misspell a man's name is to imply that he is so obscure and so negligible that you do not know how to address him and that you think so meanly of him that you need not trouble to find out. It is to offer him the subtlest of all insults—especially if he is a Scotsman. The old prides and hatreds of the clans still linger in the forms of the Scotch names, and I believe you may make a mortal enemy of, let us say, Mr. Macdonald by calling him Mr. M'Donald or *vice versa*. Indeed, I recall the case of a malignant Scotch journalist who used systematically to spell a political opponent's name M'Intosh instead of Mackintosh because he knew it made him "boil," as Stephenson made R. L. S. boil or as Thompson makes me boil.

Nor is this reverence for our names a contemptible vanity. I like a man who stands by his name and distrust the man who buys, borrows, or steals another. I have never thought so well of Bishop Percy, the author of *Percy's Reliques*, since I discovered that

his real name was Piercy, and that, being the son of a grocer, he knocked his "i" out when he went into the Church, in order to set up a claim to belong to the house of the Duke of Northumberland. He even put the Percy arms on his monument in Dromore Cathedral, and, not content with changing his own name, altered the maiden name of his wife from Gutteridge to Godriche. I am afraid Bishop Percy was a snob.

There are, of course, cases in which men change their names for reputable reasons, to continue a distinguished family association and so on; but the man who does it to cover up his tracks has usually "something rotten about him," as Johnson would say. He stamps himself as a counterfeit coin, like M. Fellaire in Anatole France's *Jocaste*. When he first started business his brass plate ran "Fellaire (de Sisac)." On removing to new premises he dropped the parentheses and put up a plate with "Fellaire, de Sisac." Changing residence again, he dropped the comma and became "Fellaire de Sisac."

It is possible of course to go to the other extreme—to err, as it were, on the side of honesty. I know a lady who began life with the maiden name of Bloomer. She married a Mr. Watlington and became Mrs. Bloomer-Watlington. Her husband died and she married a Mr. Dodd, whereupon she styled herself Mrs. Bloomer-Watlington-Dodd. She is still fairly young and Mr. Dodd, I regret to say, is in failing health. Already I have to write her name in smallish

characters to get it into a single line on the envelope. I see the time approaching when I shall have to turn over and write, let us say,

There is no need to be so aggressively faithful to one's names as all this. It is hard on your children and trying to your friends, who may have difficulty in remembering which husband came before the others. After all, a name is only a label, and if it is honest the shorter it is the better.

But the spirit of the thing is right. Let us avoid disguises. Let us stick to our names, be they ever so humble. Let us follow the great example of Cicero. His name originated with an ancestor who had a nick or dent at the tip of his nose which resembled the opening in a vetch-*cicer*. When he was standing for public office some anxious friends suggested that the young man should assume a nobler name, but he declined, saying that he would make the name of Cicero more glorious than the Scauri or Catuli. And grandly did he redeem the promise. The Scauri and the Catuli live to-day only by the fact that Cicero once mentioned them, while we know Cicero far better than we know our next door neighbour. It is a good omen for Thomson if

have a mind to make that name outlast the Cecils and Marlboroughs, if not the Pyramids. And cursed be he who desecrates it with a "p."

### ON SAWING WOOD

I do not think this article will be much concerned with the great art of sawing wood; but the theme of it came to me while I was engaged in that task. It was raining hard this morning, and it occurred to me that it was a good opportunity to cut some winter logs in the barn. The raw material of the logs lies at the end of the orchard in the shape of sections of trunks and branches of some old apple trees which David cut down for us last autumn, to enable us to extend the potato-patch by digging up a part of the orchard. I carried some of the sections into the barn and began to saw, but I was out of practice and had forgotten the trick. The saw would go askew, the points would dig in, and the whole operation seemed a clumsy failure.

Then I remembered. You are over-doing it, I said. You are making a mess of the job by too much energy—misdirected energy. The trick of sawing wood is to work within your strength. You are starting at it as if you intended to saw through the log at one stroke. It is the mistake the Rumanians have made in Transylvania. They bit off more than they could chew. You are biting off more than you can chew, and you and the log and the saw get at

cross purposes, with the results you see. The art of the business is to work easily and with a light hand, to make the incision with a firm stroke that hardly touches the surface, to move the saw forward lightly so that it barely touches the wood, to draw it back at a shade higher elevation, and above all to take your time and to avoid too much energy. "Gently does it" is the motto.

It is a lesson I am always learning and forgetting. I suppose I am one of those people who are afflicted with too eager a spirit. We want a thing done, but we cannot wait to do it. We rush at the task with all our might and expect it to surrender on the spot, and when it doesn't surrender we lose patience, complain of our tools, and feel a grievance against the perversity of things. It reminds me of the remark which a professional made to me at the practice nets long ago. He was watching a fast bowler who was slinging the ball at the batsman like a whirlwind, and with disastrous results for himself. "He would make a good bowler," said the professional, "if he wouldn't try to bowl three balls at once." Recall any really great bowler you have known and you will find that the chief impression he left on the mind was that of ease and reserve power. He was never spending up to the hilt. There was always something left in the tank. I do not speak of the medium-paced bowler, like Lohmann, whose action had a sort of adrenergic grace that masked the most wilv and governed strategy. But of the

fast bowler, like Tom Richardson or Mold or even Spofforth. With all their physical energy, you felt that their heads were cool and that they had something in hand. There was passion, but it was controlled passion.

And if you have tried mowing a meadow you will know how much the art consists in working within your powers, easily and rhythmically. The temptation to lay on with all your might is overpowering, and you stab the ground and miss your stroke and exhaust yourself in sheer futility. And then you watch John Ruddle at the job and see the whole secret of the art reveal itself. He will mow for three hours on end with never a pause except to sharpen the blade with the whetstone he carries in his hip pocket. What a feeling of reserve there is in the beautiful leisureliness of his action. You could go to sleep watching him, and you feel that he could go to sleep to his own rhythm, as the mother falls asleep to her own swaying and crooning. There is the experience of a lifetime in that masterful technique, but the point is that the secret of the technique is its restraint, its economy of effort, its patience with the task, its avoidance of flurry and hurry, and of the waste and exhaustion of over-emphasis. At the bottom, all that John Ruddle has learned is not to try to bowl three balls at once. He is always master of his job.

And if you chance to be a golfer, haven't you generally found that when you are "off your game"

it is because you have pitched the key, as it were, too high? You smite and fail, and smite harder and fail, and go on increasing the effort, and as your effort increases so does your futility. You are playing over your strength. You are screaming at the ball instead of talking to it reasonably and sensibly. Then perhaps you remember, cut down your effort to the scope of your powers, and, behold, the ball sails away on its errand with just the right flight and just the right direction and just the right length. And you purr to yourself and learn once more that the art of doing things is moderation.

It is so in all things. The man who wins is the man who keeps cool, whose effort is always proportioned to his power, who gives the impression that there is more in him than ever comes out. I have seen many a man lose the argument, not because he had the worst case, but because he was too eager, too impatient, too unrestrained in presenting it. What is the secret of the extraordinary influence which Viscount Grey exercises over the mind but the grave moderation and reserve of his style? There are scores of more eloquent speakers, more nimble disputants than he, but there has been no one in our time with the same authority and finality of speech. He conveys the sense of a mind disciplined against passion, austere in its reserve, implacably honest, understating itself with a certain cold aloofness that leaves controversy silent. Take his indictment of Germany as an example. It was as though the



verdict of the Day of Judgment had fallen on Germany. Yet it was a mere grave, dispassionate statement of the facts without a word of extravagance or violence. It was the naked truthfulness of it that was so terrible and unanswerable.

And much the most impressive description I have seen of the horrors of war was in the letter of a German artillery officer telling his experiences in the first great battle of the Somme. Yet the characteristic of the letter was its plainness and freedom from any straining after effect. He just left the thing he described to speak for itself in all its bare horror. It was a lesson we people who write would do well to remember. Let us have fewer adjectives, good people, fewer epithets. Remember, the adjective is the enemy of the noun. It is the scream that drowns the sense, the passion that turns the argument red in the face and makes it unbelievable. Was it not Stendhal who used to read the Code Napoléon once a year to teach him its severity of style?

It is still raining. I will return to the barn and practise the philosophy of moderation on those logs.

### ✓ ON EARLY RISING

THERE is no period of the year when my spirit is so much at war with the flesh as this. For the winter is over, and the woods are browning and the chor-  
isters of the fields are calling me to matins—and I

do not go. Spiritually I am an early riser. I have a passion for the dawn and the dew on the grass, and the "early pipe of half-awakened birds." On the rare occasions on which I have gone out to meet the sun upon the upland lawn or on the mountain tops I have experienced an emotion that perhaps no other experience can give. I remember a morning in the Tyrol when I had climbed Kitzbulhhorn to see the sun rise. I saw the darkness changing to chill grey, but no beam of sunlight came through the massed clouds that barred the east. Feeling that my night climb had been in vain, I turned round to the west, and there, by a sort of magical reflection, I saw the sunrise. A beam of light, invisible to the east, had pierced the clouds and struck the mountains in the west. It seemed to turn them to molten gold, and as it moved along the black mass it was as though a vast torch was setting the world aflame. And I remembered that fine stanza of Clough's:

And not through eastern windows only,  
When morning comes, comes in the light.  
In front the dawn breaks slow, how slowly,  
But westward, look, the land is bright.

And there was that other dawn which I saw from the icy ridge of the Petersgrat, turning the snow-clad summits of the Matterhorn, the Weisshorn, and Mont Blanc to a magic realm of rose-tinted battlements.

And there are others. But they are few, for though I am spiritually a son of the morning, I am

physically a sluggard. There are some people who are born with a gift for early rising. I was born with a genius for lying in bed. I can go to bed as late as anybody, and have no joy in a company that begins to yawn and grow drowsy about ten o'clock. But in the early rising handicap I am not a starter. A merciful providence has given me a task that keeps me working far into the night and makes breakfast and the newspaper in bed a matter of duty. No words can express the sense of secret satisfaction with which I wake and realise that I haven't to get up, that stern duty bids me lie a little longer, listening to the comfortable household noises down below and the cheerful songs outside, studying anew the pattern of the wall-paper and taking the problems of life "lying down" in no craven sense.

I know there are many people who have to catch early morning buses and trams who would envy me if they knew my luck. For the ignoble family of sluggards is numerous. It includes many distinguished men. It includes saints as well as sages. That moral paragon, Dr. Arnold, was one of them; Thomson, the author of *The City of Dreadful Night*, was another. Bishop Selwyn even put the duty of lying in bed on a moral plane. "I did once rise early," he said, "but I felt so vain all the morning and so sleepy all the afternoon that I determined not to do it again." He stayed in bed to mortify his pride, to make himself humble. And is not humility one of the cardinal virtues of a good Christian? I have

fancied myself that people who rise early are slightly self-righteous. They can't help feeling a little scornful of us sluggards. And we know it. Humility is the badge of all our tribe. We are not proud of lying in bed. We are ashamed—and happy. The noblest sluggard of us all has stated our case for us. "No man practises so well as he writes," said Dr. Johnson. "I have all my life been lying till noon; yet I tell all young men, and tell them with great sincerity, that nobody who does not rise early will ever do any good."

Of course we pay the penalty. We do not catch the early worm. When we turn out all the bargains have gone, and we are left only with the odds and ends. From a practical point of view, we have no defence. We know that an early start is the secret of success. It used to be said of the Duke of Newcastle that he always went about as though he had got up half an hour late, and was trying all day to catch it up. And history has recorded what a grotesque failure he was in politics. When someone asked Nelson for the secret of his success he replied: "Well, you see, I always manage to be a quarter of an hour in front of the other fellow." And the recipe holds good to-day. When the inner history of the battle of the Falkland Islands is told in detail, it will be found that it was the early start insisted on by the one man of military genius and vision we have produced in this war that gave us that priceless victory.

And if you have ever been on a walking tour or a cycling tour you know that early rising is the key of the business. Start early and you are master of your programme and your fate. You can linger by the way, take a dip in the mountain tarn, lie under the shadow of a great rock in the hot afternoon, and arrive at the valley inn in comfortable time for the evening meal. Start late and you are the slave of the hours. You chase them with weary feet, pass the tarn with the haste of a dispatch bearer though you are dying for a bathe, and arrive when the roast and boiled are cleared away and the merry company are doing a "traverse" around the skirting board of the billiard room. Happy reader, if you know the inn I mean—the jolly inn at Wasdale Head.

No, whether from the point of view of business or pleasure, worldly wisdom or spiritual satisfaction, there is nothing to be said in our defence. All that we can say for lying in bed is what Foote—I think it was Foote—said about the rum. "I went into a public-house," he said, "and heard one man call for some rum because he was hot, and another call for some rum because he was cold. Then I called for some rum because I liked it." We sluggards had better make the same clean breast of the business. We lie in bed because we like it. Just that. Nothing more. We like it. We claim no virtue, ask no indulgence, accept with humility the rebukes of the strenuous.

As for me, I have a licence—nay, I have more;

I have a duty. It is my duty to lie in bed o' mornings until the day is well aired. For I burn the midnight oil, and the early blackbird—the first of our choir to awake—has often saluted me on my way home. Therefore I lie in bed in the morning looking at the ceiling and listening to the sounds of the busy world without a twinge of conscience. If you were listening, you would hear me laugh softly to myself as I give the pillow another shake and thank providence for having given me a job that enables me to enjoy the privileges of the sluggard without incurring the odium that he so richly deserves.

## A DITHYRAMB ON A DOG

CHUM, roped securely to the cherry tree, is barking at the universe in general and at the cows in the paddock beyond the orchard in particular. Occasionally he pauses to snap at passing bees, of which the orchard is full on this bright May morning, but he soon tires of this diversion and resumes his loud-voiced demand to share in the good things that are going. For the sun is high, the cuckoo is shouting over the valley, and the woods are calling him to unknown adventures. They shall not call in vain. Work shall be suspended and this morning shall be dedicated to his service. For this is the day of deliverance. The word is spoken and the shadow

of the sword is lifted. The battle for his biscuit is won. //

He does not know what a narrow shave he has had. He does not know that for weeks past he has been under sentence of death as an encumbrance, a luxury that this savage world of men could no longer afford; that having taken away his bones we were about to take away his biscuits and leave his cheerful companionship a memory of the dream world we lived in before the Great Killing began. All this he does not know. That is one of the numerous advantages of being a dog. He knows nothing of the infamies of men or of the incertitudes of life. He does not look before and after and pine for what is not. He has no yesterday and no to-morrow—only the happy or the unhappy present. He does not, as Whitman says, "lie awake at night thinking of his soul," or lamenting his past or worrying about his future. His bereavements do not disturb him and he doesn't care twopence about his career. He has no debts and hungers for no honours. He would rather have a bone than a baronetcy. He does not turn over old albums, with their pictured records of forgotten holidays and happy scenes and yearn for the "tender grace of a day that is dead," or wonder whether he will keep his job and what will become of his "poor old family," as Stevenson used to say, if he doesn't, or speculate whether the war will end this year, next year, some time, or never. He doesn't even know there is a war. Think of it! He doesn't know there

is a war. O happy dog! Give him a bone, a biscuit, a good word, and a scamper in the woods, and his cup of joy is full. Would that my needs were as few and as easily satisfied.

And now his biscuit is safe and I have the rare privilege of rejoicing with Sir Frederick Banbury. I do not know that I should go as far as he seems to go, for in that touching little speech of his at the Cannon Street Hotel he indicated that nothing in the heavens above or in the earth beneath should stand between him and his dogs. "In August 1914," he said, "my son went to France. The night before he left he said, 'Father, look after my dogs and horses while I am away.' I said, 'Don't you worry about them.' He was killed in December, and I have got the horses and dogs now. As I said to Mr. Bonar Law last year, I should like to see the man who would tell me I have not to look after my son's dogs and horses." Well, I suppose that if the choice were between a German victory and a dog biscuit the dog biscuit would have to go, Sir Frederick. But I rejoice with you that we have not to make the choice. I rejoice that the sentence of death has passed from your dead son's horses and dogs and from that noble creature under the cherry tree.

Look at him, barking now at the cows, now with eloquent appeal to me, and then, having caught my eye, turning sportively to worry the hated rope. He knows that my intentions this morning are honourable. I think he feels that, in spite of appearances,



I am in that humour in which at any radiant moment the magic word "Walk" may leap from my lips. What a word that is. No sleep so sound that it will not penetrate its depths and bring him, passionately awake, to his feet. He would sacrifice the whole dictionary for that one electric syllable. That and its brother "Bones." Give him these good, sound, sensible words, and all the fancies of the poets and all the rhetoric of the statesmen may whistle down the winds. He has no use for them. "Walk" and "Bones"—that is the speech a fellow can understand.

Yes, Chum knows very well that I am thinking about him and thinking about him in an uncommonly friendly way. That is the secret of the strange intimacy between us. We may love other animals, and other animals may respond to our affection. But the dog is the only animal who has a reciprocal intelligence. As Coleridge says, he is the only animal that *looks upward* to man, strains to catch his meanings, hungers for his approval. Stroke a cat or a horse, and it will have a physical pleasure; but pat Chum and call him "Good dog!" and he has a spiritual pleasure. He feels good. He is pleased because you are pleased. His tail, his eyebrows, every part of him, proclaim that "God's in his heaven, all's right with the world," and that he himself is on the side of the angels.

And just as he has the sense of virtue, so also he has the sense of sin. A cat may be taught not to do certain things, but if it is caught out and flees, it flees

not from shame, but from fear. But the shame of a dog touches an abyss of misery as bottomless as any human emotion. He has fallen out of the state of grace, and nothing but the absolution and remission of his sin will restore him to happiness. By his association with man he seems to have caught something of his capacity for spiritual misery. I had an Airedale once who had moods of despondency as abysmal as my own. He was as sentimental as any minor poet, and at the sound of certain tunes on the piano he would break into paroxysms of grief, whining and moaning as if in one moment of concentrated anguish he recalled every bereavement he had endured, every bone he had lost, every stone heaved at him by his hated enemy, the butcher's boy. Indeed, there are times when the dog approximates so close to our intelligence that he seems to be of us, a sort of humble relation of ourselves, with our elementary feelings but not our gift of expression, our joy but not our laughter, our misery but not our tears, our thoughts but not our speech. To sentence him to death would be almost like homicide, and the day of his reprieve should be celebrated as a festival.

Come, old friend. Let us away to the woods.  
"Walk."

## ON WORD-MAGIC

I SEE that a discussion has arisen in the *Spectator* on the *Canadian Boat Song*. It appeared in *Blackwood's* nearly a century ago, and ever since its authorship has been the subject of recurrent controversy. The author may have been "Christopher North," or his brother, Tom Wilson, or Galt, or the Ettrick Shepherd, or the Earl of Eglinton, or none of these. We shall never know. It is one of those pleasant mysteries of the past, like the authorship of the Junius Letters (if, indeed, that can be called a mystery), which can never be exhausted because they can never be solved. I am not going to offer an opinion; for I have none, and I refer to the subject only to illustrate the magic of a word. The poem lives by virtue of the famous stanza:

From the lone shieling of the misty island  
Mountains divide us, and the waste of seas—  
Yet still the blood is strong, the heart is Highland,  
And we in dreams behold the Hebrides.

It would be an insensible heart that did not feel the surge of this strong music. The yearning of the exile for the motherland has never been uttered with more poignant beauty, though Stevenson came near the same note of tender anguish in the lines written in far Samoa and ending:

Be it granted me to behold you again, in dying,  
Hills of home, and to hear again the call,  
Hear about the graves of the martyrs the peewees  
crying—  
And hear no more at all.

But for energy and masculine emotion the unknown author takes the palm. The verse is like a great wave of the sea, rolling in to the mother shore, gathering impetus and grandeur as it goes, culminating in the note of vision and scattering itself triumphantly in the splendour of that word "Hebrides."

It is a beautiful illustration of the magic of a word used in its perfect setting. It gathers up the emotion of the theme into one chord of fulfilment and flings open the casement of the mind to far horizons. It is not the only instance in which the name has been used with extraordinary effect. Wordsworth's *Solitary Reaper* has many beautiful lines, but the peculiar glory of the poem dwells in the couplet in which, searching for parallels for the song of the Highland girl that fills "the vale profound," he hears in imagination the cuckoo's call

Breaking the silence of the seas  
Among the farthest Hebrides.

Wordsworth, like Homer and Milton, and all who touch the sublime in poetry, had the power of transmuting a proper name to a strange and significant beauty. The most memorable example, perhaps, is

in the closing lines of the poem to Dorothy Wordsworth:

But an old age serene and bright,  
And lovely as a Lapland night,  
Shall lead thee to thy grave.

"Lapland" is an intrinsically beautiful word, but it is its setting in this case that makes it shine, pure and austere, like a star in the heavens of poetry. And the miraculous word need not be intrinsically beautiful. Darien is not, yet it is that word in which perhaps the greatest of all sonnets finds its breathless, astonished close:

Silent—upon a peak—in Dar—ien.

And the truth is that the magic of words is not in the words themselves, but in the distinction, delicacy, surprise of their use. Take the great line which Shakespeare puts into the mouth of Antony:

I am dying, Egypt, dying.

It is the only occasion in the play on which he makes Antony speak of Cleopatra by her territorial name and there is no warrant for the usage in Plutarch. It is a stroke of sheer word magic. It summons up with a sudden magnificence all the mystery and splendour incarnated in the woman for whom he has gambled away the world and all the earthly glories that are fading into the darkness of death. The whole tragedy seems to flame to its culmination

in this word that suddenly lifts the action from the human plane to the scale of cosmic drama.

Words of course have an individuality, a perfume of their own, but just as the flame in the heart of the diamond has to be revealed by the craftsman, so the true magic of a beautiful word only discloses itself at the touch of the master. "Quiet" is an ordinary enough word, and few are more frequently on our lips. Yet what wonderful effects Wordsworth, Coleridge and Keats extract from it:

It is a beauteous evening, calm and free;  
The holy time is quiet as a nun,  
Breathless with adoration.

The whole passage is a symphony of the sunset, but "it is that ordinary word "quiet" which breathes like a benediction through the cadence, filling the mind with the sense of an illimitable peace. And so with Coleridge's "singeth a quiet tune," or Keats'

Full of sweet dreams and health and quiet breathing.  
Or when, "half in love with easeful Death," he

Called him soft names in many a mused rhyme  
To take into the air my quiet breath.

And again:

Far from the fiery noon and eve's one star  
Sat grey-hair'd Saturn, quiet as a stone

There have been greater poets than Keats, but none who has had a surer instinct for the precious word than he had. Byron had none of this magician

touch, Shelley got his effects by the glow and fervour of his spirit; Swinburne by the sheer torrent of his song, and Browning by the energy of his thought. Tennyson was much more of the artificer in words than these, but he had not the secret of the word-magic of Shakespeare, Wordsworth, or Keats. Compare the use of adjectives in two things like Shelley's *Ode to the Skylark* and Keats' *Ode to the Nightingale*, and the difference is startling. Both are incomparable, but in the one case it is the hurry of the song, the flood of rapture that delights us: in the other each separate line holds us with its jewelled word. "*Embalmed* darkness," "*Verdurous* glooms," "Now more than ever seems it *rich* to die," "Cooled a long age in the *deep-delved* earth." "*Darkling* Listen." "She stood in tears amid the *alien* corn." "Oh, for a beaker full of the *warm south*." "With beaded bubbles *winking* at the brim." "No *hungry* generations tread thee down." And so on. Such a casket of jewels can be found in no other poet that has used our tongue. If Keats' vocabulary had a defect it was a certain over-ripeness, a languorous beauty that, like the touch of his hand, spoke of death. It lacked the fresh, happy, sunlit spirit of Shakespeare's sovran word.

Word-magic belongs to poetry. In prose it is an intrusion. That was the view of Coleridge. It was because, among its other qualities, Southey's writing was so free from the shock of the dazzling word that Coleridge held it to be the perfect example

of pure prose. The modulations are so just, the note so unaffected, the current so clear and untroubled that you read on without pausing once to think "What a brilliant writer this fellow is." And that is the true triumph of the art. It is an art which addresses itself to the mind, and not the emotions, and word-magic does not belong to its true armoury.

### ON THE RULE OF THE ROAD

THAT was a jolly story which Mr. Arthur Ransome told the other day in one of his messages from Petrograd. A stout old lady was walking with her basket down the middle of a street in Petrograd to the great confusion of the traffic and with no small peril to herself. It was pointed out to her that the pavement was the place for foot-passengers, but she replied: "I'm going to walk where I like. We've got liberty now." It did not occur to the dear old lady that if liberty entitled the foot-passenger to walk down the middle of the road it also entitled the cab-driver to drive on the pavement, and that the end of such liberty would be universal chaos. Everybody would be getting in everybody else's way and nobody would get anywhere. Individual liberty would have become social anarchy.

There is a danger of the world getting liberty-drunk in these days like the old lady with the basket, and



it is just as well to remind ourselves of what the rule of the road means. It means that in order that the liberties of all may be preserved the liberties of everybody must be curtailed. When the policeman, say, at Piccadilly Circus steps into the middle of the road and puts out his hand, he is the symbol not of tyranny, but of liberty. You may not think so. You may, being in a hurry and seeing your motor-car pulled up by this insolence of office, feel that your liberty has been outraged. How dare this fellow interfere with your free use of the public highway? Then, if you are a reasonable person, you will reflect that if he did not, incidentally, interfere with you he would interfere with no one, and the result would be that Piccadilly Circus would be a maelstrom that you would never cross at all. You have submitted to a curtailment of private liberty in order that you may enjoy a social order which makes your liberty a reality.

Liberty is not a personal affair only, but a social contract. It is an accommodation of interests. In matters which do not touch anybody else's liberty, of course, I may be as free as I like. If I choose to go down the Strand in a dressing-gown, with long hair and bare feet, who shall say me nay? You have liberty to laugh at me, but I have liberty to be indifferent to you. And if I have a fancy for dyeing my hair, or waxing my moustache (which heaven forbid), or wearing a tall hat, a frock-coat and sandals, or going to bed late or getting up early, I shall follow

my fancy and ask no man's permission. I shall not inquire of you whether I may eat mustard with my mutton. I may like mustard with my mutton. And you will not ask me whether you may be a Protestant or a Catholic, whether you may marry the dark lady or the fair lady, whether you may prefer Ella Wheeler Wilcox to Wordsworth, or champagne to shandygaff.

In all these and a thousand other details you and I please ourselves and ask no one's leave. We have a whole kingdom in which we rule alone, can do what we choose, be wise or ridiculous, harsh or easy, conventional or odd. But directly we step out of that kingdom our personal liberty of action becomes qualified by other people's liberty. I might like to practise on the trombone from midnight till three in the morning. If I went on to the top of Helvellyn to do it I could please myself, but if I do it in my bedroom my family will object, and if I do it out in the streets the neighbours will remind me that my liberty to blow the trombone must not interfere with their liberty to sleep in quiet. There are a lot of people in the world, and I have to accommodate my liberty to their liberties.

We are all liable to forget this, and unfortunately we are much more conscious of the imperfections of others in this respect than of our own.

I got into a railway carriage at a country station the other morning and settled down for what the schoolboys would call an hour's swot at a Blue-

book. I was not reading it for pleasure. The truth is that I never do read Blue-Books for pleasure. I read them as a barrister reads a brief, for the very humble purpose of turning an honest penny out of them. Now, if you are reading a book for pleasure it doesn't matter what is going on around you. I think I could enjoy *Tristram Shandy* or *Treasure Island* in the midst of an earthquake.

But when you are reading a thing as a task you need reasonable quiet, and that is what I didn't get, for at the next station in came a couple of men, one of whom talked to his friend for the rest of the journey in a loud and pompous voice. He was one of those people who remind one of that story of Horne Tooke, who, meeting a person of immense swagger in the street, stopped him and said, "Excuse me, sir, but are you someone in particular?" This gentleman was someone in particular. As I wrestled with clauses and sections, his voice rose like a gale, and his family history, the deeds of his sons in the war, and his criticisms of the generals and the politicians submerged my poor attempts to hang on to my job. I shut up the Blue-book, looked out of the window, and listened wearily while the voice thundered on with themes like these: "Now what French ought to have done . . ." "The mistake the Germans made . . ." "If only Asquith had . . ." You know the sort of stuff. I had heard it all before, oh, so often. It was like a barrel-organ groaning out some banal song of long ago.

If I had asked him to be good enough to talk in a lower tone I daresay he would have thought I was a very rude fellow. It did not occur to him that anybody could have anything better to do than to listen to him, and I have no doubt he left the carriage convinced that everybody in it had, thanks to him, had a very illuminating journey, and would carry away a pleasing impression of his encyclopædic range. He was obviously a well-intentioned person. The thing that was wrong with him was that he had not the social sense. He was not "a clubbable man."

A reasonable consideration for the rights or feelings of others is the foundation of social conduct. It is commonly alleged against women that in this respect they are less civilised than men, and I am bound to confess that in my experience it is the woman—the well-dressed woman—who thrusts herself in front of you at the ticket office. The man would not attempt it, partly because he knows the thing would not be tolerated from him, but also because he has been better drilled in the small give-and-take of social relationships. He has lived more in the broad current of the world, where you have to learn to accommodate yourself to the general standard of conduct, and his school life, his club life, and his games have in this respect given him a training that women are only now beginning to enjoy.

I believe that the rights of small people and quiet people are as important to preserve as the rights

of small nationalities. When I hear the aggressive, bullying horn which some motorists deliberately use, I confess that I feel something boiling up in me which is very like what I felt when Germany came trampling like a bully over Belgium. By what right, my dear sir, do you go along our highways uttering that hideous curse on all who impede your path? Cannot you announce your coming like a gentleman? Cannot you take your turn? Are you someone in particular or are you simply a hot gossamer of the prophet Nietzsche? I find myself wondering what sort of person it is who can sit behind that hog-like outrage without realising that he is the spirit of Prussia incarnate, and a very ugly spectacle in a civilised world.

And there is the more harmless person who has bought a very blatant gramophone, and on Sunday afternoon sets the thing going, opens the windows and fills the street with *Keep the Home Fires Burning* or some similar banality. What are the right limits of social behaviour in a matter of this sort? Let us take the trombone as an illustration again. Hazlitt said that a man who wanted to learn that fearsome instrument was entitled to learn it in his own house, even though he was a nuisance to his neighbours, but it was his business to make the nuisance as slight as possible. He must practise in the attic, and shut the window. He had no right to sit in his front room, open the window, and blow his noise into his neighbours' ears with the maximum of

violence. And so with the gramophone. If you like the gramophone you are entitled to have it, but you are interfering with the liberties of your neighbours if you don't do what you can to limit the noise to your own household. Your neighbours may not like *Keep the Home Fires Burning*. They may prefer to have their Sunday afternoon undisturbed, and it is as great an impertinence for you wilfully to trespass on their peace as it would be to go, unasked, into their gardens and trample on their flower beds.

There are cases, of course, where the clash of liberties seems to defy compromise. My dear old friend X., who lives in a West End square and who is an amazing mixture of good nature and irascibility, flies into a passion when he hears a street piano, and rushes out to order it away. But near by lives a distinguished lady of romantic picaresque tastes, who dotes on street pianos, and attracts them as wasps are attracted to a jar of jam. Whose liberty in this case should surrender to the other? For the life of me I cannot say. It is as reasonable to like street pianos as to dislike them—and *vice versa*. I would give much to hear Sancho Panza's solution of such a nice riddle.

I suppose the fact is that we can be neither complete anarchists nor complete socialists in this complex world—or rather we must be a judicious mixture of both. We have both liberties to preserve—our individual liberty and our social liberty. We must watch the bureaucrat on the one side and warn

off the anarchist on the other. I am neither a Marxist, nor a Tolstoyan, but a compromise. I shall not permit any authority to say that my child must go to this school or that, shall specialise in science or arts, shall play rugger or soccer. These things are personal. But if I proceed to say that my child shall have no education at all, that he shall be brought up as a primeval savage, or at Mr. Fagin's academy for pickpockets, then Society will politely but firmly tell me that it has no use for primeval savages and a very stern objection to pickpockets, and that my child must have a certain minimum of education whether I like it or not. I cannot have the liberty to be a nuisance to my neighbours or make my child a burden and a danger to the commonwealth.

It is in the small matters of conduct, in the observance of the rule of the road, that we pass judgment upon ourselves, and declare that we are civilised or uncivilised. The great moments of heroism and sacrifice are rare. It is the little habits of commonplace intercourse that make up the great sum of life and sweeten or make bitter the journey. I hope my friend in the railway carriage will reflect on this. Then he will not cease, I am sure, to explain to his neighbour where French went wrong and where the Germans went ditto; but he will do it in a way that will permit me to read my Blue-book undisturbed.

## ON MOWING

I HAVE hung the scythe up in the barn and now I am going to sing its praises. And if you doubt my competence to sing on so noble a theme come with me into the orchard, smell the new-mown hay, mark the swathes where they lie and note the workmanship. Yes, I admit that over there by the damson trees and down by the fence there is a sort of unkempt, dishevelled appearance about the grass as though it had been stabbed and tortured by some insane animal armed with an axe. It is true. It has been stabbed and tortured by an insane animal. It was there that I began. It was there that I hacked and hewed, perspired and suffered. It was there that I said things of which in my calmer moments I should disapprove. It was there that I served my apprenticeship to the scythe. But let your eye scan gently that stricken pasture and pause here where the orchard slopes to the paddock. I do not care who looks at this bit. I am prepared to stand or fall by it. It speaks for itself. The signature of the master hand is here. It is my signature.

And having written that signature I feel like the wounded soldier spoken of by the "Wayfarer" in the *Nation*. He was returning to England, and as he looked from the train upon the cheerful Kentish landscape and saw the haymakers in the fields he



said, "I feel as though I should like to cut grass all the rest of my life." I do not know whether it was the craftsman in him that spoke. Perhaps it was only the beautiful sanity and peace of the scene, contrasted with the squalid nightmare he had left behind, that wrung the words from him. But they were words that any one who has used a scythe would echo. I echo them. I feel that I could look forward joyfully to an eternity of sunny days and illimitable fields of waving grass and just go on mowing and mowing and mowing for ever. I am chilled by the thought that you can only play the barber to nature once, or at most twice, a year. I look back over the summers of the past, and lament my wasted opportunities. What meadows I might have mown had I only known the joy of it.

For mowing is the most delightful disguise that work can wear. When once you have got the trick of it, it goes with a rhythm that is intoxicating. The scythe, which looked so ungainly and unmanageable a tool, gradually changes its character. It becomes an instrument of infinite flexibility and delicacy. The lines that seemed so uncouth and clownish are discovered to be the refinement of time. What centuries of accumulated experience under the suns of what diverse lands have gone to the perfecting of this most ancient tool of the fields, shaping the blade so cunningly, adjusting it to the handle at so artful an angle, disposing the nebs with such true relationship to the action of the body, so that, skil-

fully used, the instrument loses the sense of weight and seems to carry you forward by its own smooth, almost instinctive motion. It is like an extension of yourself, with a touch as fine as the brush of a butterfly's wing and a stroke as bold and resistless as the sweep of a cataract. It is no longer a clumsy, blundering, dead thing, but as obedient as your hand and as conscious as your touch. You seem to have developed a new member, far-reaching, with the edge of a scimitar, that will flick off a daisy or fell a forest of stalwart grasses.

And as the intimacy grows you note how the action simplifies itself. The violent stabbings and discords are resolved into a harmony as serene as a pastoral symphony. You feel the rhythm taking shape, and as it develops the body becomes captive to its own task. You are no longer manipulating a tool. You and the tool have become magically one, fused in a common intelligence, so that you hardly know whether you swing the scythe or the scythe bears you forward on its own strong, swimming stroke. The mind, released, stands aloof in a sort of delighted calm, rejoicing in a spectacle in which it has ceased to have a conscious part, noting the bold swing of the body backwards for the stroke (the blade lightly skimming the ground, as the oar gently flatters the water in its return), the delicate play of the wrist as the scythe comes into action, the "swish" that tells that the stroke is true and clean, the thrust from the waist upwards that carries it clear,

the dip of the blade that leaves the swathe behind, the moderate, timely, exact movement of the feet preparatory to the next stroke, the low, musical hum of the vibrating steel. A frog hops out in alarm at the sudden invasion of his secrecy among the deep grasses. You hope he won't get in the way of that terrible finger, but you are drunk with the rhythm of the scythe and are swept along on its imperious current. You are no longer a man, but a motion. The frog must take his chance. Swish—swish—swish——

Not that the rhythm is unrelieved. It has its "accidentals." You repeat a stroke that has not pleased you, with a curious sense of pleasure at the interrupted movement which has yet not changed the theme; you nip off a tuft here or there as the singer throws in a stray flourish to garland the measure; you trim round the trees with the pleasant feeling that you can make this big thing do a little thing so deftly; you pause to whet the blade with the hone. But all the time the song of the scythe goes on. It fills your mind and courses through your blood. Your pulse beats to the rhythmic swish—swish—swish, and to that measure you pass into a waking sleep in which the hum of bees and the song of lark and cuckoo seem to belong to a dream world through which you are floating, bound to a magic oar.

The sun climbs the heavens above the eastward hills, goes regally overhead, and slopes to his setting

beyond the plain. You mark the shadows shorten and lengthen as they steal round the trees. A thrush sings ceaselessly through the morning from a beech tree on the other side of the lane, falls silent during the heat of the afternoon and begins again as the shadows lengthen and a cool wind comes out of the west. Overhead the swifts are hawking in the high air for their evening meal. Presently they descend and chase each other over the orchard with the curious sound of an indrawn whistle that belongs to the symphony of late summer evenings. You are pleasantly conscious of these pleasant things as you swing to the measured beat of the scythe, and your thoughts play lightly with kindred fancies, snatches of old song, legends of long ago, Ruth in the fields of Boaz, and Horace on his Sabine farm, the sonorous imagery of Israel linking up the waving grasses with the life of man and the scythe with the reaper of a more august harvest. . . . The plain darkens, and the last sounds of day fall on the ear, the distant bark of a dog, the lowing of cattle in the valley, the intimate gurglings of the thrush settling for the night in the nest, the drone of a winged beetle blundering through the dusk, one final note of the whitethroat. . . . There is still light for this last slope to the paddock. Swish—swish—swish. . . .





## EPILOGUE

By S. E. MALTBY, M.A.

No book that was ever written interests everybody. Just as there are some people who will never read Shakespeare, so there are others who will find nothing amusing in *Three Men in a Boat*, or be bored to death by *Treasure Island*. They may not be by any means dull or stupid people either. Some wise man has said that there is no more common error than to suppose that other people are ignorant or uneducated because they don't happen to know the things that you know. I will venture to put side by side with that the error of expecting that other people should like what you like, whether it be clothes, food, games, amusements, or, what we are now concerned with, books. So, if you have read this book without interest or enjoyment, don't think I am going to condemn you; far from it. You may be a passionate admirer and voracious reader of any number of books which I never open, and perhaps have not the taste or the intelligence to appreciate. However, all my friends both young and old seem very grateful to me for having introduced them to "Alpha of the Plough," and perhaps you also now have enough interest in the essays to spend a little time in thinking over them and paying some little attention to what

the author says, and the way in which he says it. As a matter of fact in writing this I feel very much the same as I do when I happen to be gardening and find a little group of people out for a walk stopping to lean over our gate and remark to one another what a pretty little cottage and garden it is. I should like to bring them inside to have a look round so that I could show them the flowers and plants a little more closely—trusting, by the way, that they would not be too critical of the weeds. Let me assume then, that you have enjoyed the general prospect of the little province of the realm of literature you have strolled through, and that you are prepared to think over it and pay some attention to its charms. For I can hardly believe that you have not been conscious of pleasure and enjoyment, or that you have not formed a sort of friendly attachment to the author.

When I asked a number of young folks what they liked particularly about some of these essays several of them said: "They are so sensible, and they are funny without being silly." To my mind that is very true and it is a great thing to say of an essay. For at bottom, if you think about it, you will find that it means that the essays have shown you something in a true light, and yet have made the vision of the truth pleasant and not forbidding. At the same time the real point that the writer had in mind has not been obscured by a cheap facility for saying smart things and making you laugh.

For myself I am grateful to a speaker if I remember nothing of what he has said but something that makes me laugh when I think of it. But really he has failed if the story or the saying has not brought back to mind the point which it illustrated. Now I think you will find that any funny passage you recall from these essays will bring back with it a sensible idea of some value; and, conversely, any serious idea will be connected with a good story or a funny remark. As a test of the former, can you recall the S.P.P.A.W. without thinking of the whole subject of the freedom of women? And as a test of the latter can you think of the essay *On the Rule of the Road* without remembering the old lady in the middle of the street in Petrograd? Try a few other cases and see whether Alpha has not managed very happily to combine truth and humour. And can you find anything merely silly in any of the essays?

From some of the same young critics I also received this comment: "He keeps to the point and drives it in by so many illustrations." Is that true? Read through any essay again, and I think you will be astonished to see how many points there are, but is it not true that they all bear on the central thought? Now that again is a great virtue in any writing, and for the matter of that, in speaking. We should never forget that writing is merely a later developed, more deliberate and more elaborate method of expressing thought than speaking, but



there is no essential difference between them. The preacher, the political speaker, the lecturer, who starts with a text or a title, and wanders off into all kinds of side-tracks, who must tell you something just because it happened, or because it happened to come into his head at the moment, is apt not only to weaken his whole effort but also to prove unsatisfying and after a time rather trying. In this connection it is worth while turning up again, say, *On Umbrella Morals*. What is the idea so cleverly worked out? The umbrella, if one may say so, is merely a peg on which to hang the idea "how we play hide and seek with our conscience." And what a wealth of illustration of this theme is provided. *On Catching Trains* would also make an interesting study from the same standpoint.

You will no doubt have been struck by the great variety of these essays, and it would be worth while to attempt a classification of them. But notwithstanding the variety many of them have this very striking feature in common—they are quite obviously written by a townsman, and yet they are full of a real and deep love of nature and of all natural beauty. Take, for instance, *On a Distant View of a Pig*; *On Mowing*; *On Early Rising*. There are indeed various ways of regarding nature, and nothing could provide clearer proof of this than a comparison of Alpha's attitude with that of Richard Jefferies, or that of Wordsworth. There is here no trace of sentimental worship of the wild state of

nature or of man. Can you imagine Alpha writing—not, by the way, that Jefferies did—of a scene

Where every prospect pleases  
And only man is vile?

Nor will you find nature bringing to him, as she did to Wordsworth,

Thoughts that do often lie too deep for tears.

On the contrary, what endless delight there is for man in the world of nature if he will only enjoy it; and man is part of nature. I need hardly point out the proofs that Alpha is a townsman. You can easily find them for yourself, perhaps best of all in *On Seeing London*, but whether his heart is more in town or country I will leave you to decide.

Now we are approaching what I am inclined to think is the real and deep attraction of this book. Does it not reveal a delightful personality?—a man who finds pleasure in the most diverse occupations, and one who knows indeed that man may be vile but who does not think that this is the most important thing about him; or as a friend of mine with whom I have been discussing these essays puts it: “he sees the best in man as uppermost, but knows the moral slums; he finds men more noble than ignoble.” I daresay that we might get a bad shock if we met Alpha, and might find him a surly, dull man, far more inclined to sit in an easy chair and smoke than to dig or mow or take his

dog for a walk. But that does not matter. The man revealed in his writings is very likable, is he not? You know where he stands, he has wide sympathies, clear and enlightened ideas, a quick mind, a vein of humour that is for ever giving us pleasant surprises, and never leaving a sting or bitter feeling. It might even be a profitable little exercise to run through the essays hunting for his confessions of personal peculiarities and the little human weaknesses that somehow seem to endear great men to us. Do you recall such phrases as these? "I am as much a child as anyone when the hammer and the anvil are playing their primeval music." Or: "We are most of us slackers at bottom and in need of the discipline of a time-table to keep us on the move.", "If I could put off writing this article till to-morrow I should easily convince myself that I hadn't time to write it to-day." Or this: "I have been catching trains all my life, and all my life I have been afraid that I shouldn't catch them."

But if all this is true there still remains another very important matter to consider. By what means does Alpha convey to us so much pleasure, and set us thinking? In other words, what of his art and workmanship? You may be conscious that you are sitting in a very comfortable chair, or travelling in a first-rate motor-car, and presently begin wondering how such comfort or speed has been attained. What is the design and the material? Let us think of these essays from that point of view.

First, then, I should be inclined to put clearness of expression, directness, going straight for the point. Is this merely the same quality as keeping to the point to which I have already alluded? To some extent doubtless it is, but now I am thinking more of each word, phrase, sentence and paragraph. There may be hard words and there may be long sentences, but supposing your vocabulary enables you to follow the thought, do you not feel that you move along with an ease and a security and a clearness of view that I can only parallel with the experience of being driven through picturesque country by a competent chauffeur in a first-class motor-car over good roads on a bright and exhilarating morning. How much of this effect is due just to the competent use of words by Alpha in saying what he has to say? Could anything be plainer or more effective and direct than this, from the essay *On the Cheerfulness of the Blind*, concerning Mr. Pulitzer? "Night came down on him with terrible suddenness. He was watching the sunset from his villa one evening when he said: 'How quickly the sun has set.' 'But it has not set,' said his companion. 'Oh, yes, it has; it is quite dark,' he answered. In that moment he had gone stone blind."

In the second place, Alpha has a most happy choice of words and expressions, covering a great range with the utmost ease, and adding a feeling to his work quite distinct from that of mere competence and power. It would be easy to find in many of the

essays some word or phrase which a very particular kind of scholarly critic, with pedantic ideas of what is "good English," might object to. But then one does not have to be very old to remember the days when a lady riding a bicycle was looked upon by the very proper people as a degraded creature quite as shocking as one who gambled or got drunk, if not a good deal worse. A little study of the subject will show one that use of language changes just as habits and customs do, but that scholars tend to lag behind the movement of actual spoken language. Perhaps the very fact that Alpha uses freely in writing the language we are used to hearing and not that of Macaulay or Lamb or Thackeray will attract some readers and repel others. Take some essay—say *On Umbrella Morals*—and look through it from this point of view. The third sentence runs: "The frame would not work for one thing, and if it had worked, I would not have put the thing up," and so on. Any school-boy can pick out a glaring fault in that sentence. And here is one from *On a Hawthorn Hedge* that stumbles along awkwardly: "I do not mind confessing that I continued my way up the lane with something less than my former exhilaration. Partly, no doubt, this was due to the fact that at this point the hill begins its job of climbing in earnest, and is a stiff pull at the end of a long day's work and a tiresome journey—especially if you are carrying a bag." But probably you won't mind the fact that the author often resorts to very ordinary kind

of talk when he is dealing with very plain things; all the more delightful are the countless happy phrases, similes, and images with which he besprinkles his pages. Take this same essay, *On a Hawthorn Hedge*—I have chosen it quite at random—and see what there is: “mild expectation,” “the flash of white hawthorn in the starlight,” “sudden beauty,” “that ecstasy of spring,” “hedgerows bursting into foam,” “this stern world of blood and tears,” “the curfew bell of spring,” “that eternal spring to which we should never bid adieu,” “the jolly clatter of the rooks,” “the prologue of spring,” “the magic of the living world.”

Probably some better read person than I will know that not all of these are original; but never mind, take them as they are. If you feel their aptness and force, look through another essay for yourself and pick out a few more gems.

An easy transition brings us from this to what I should call the beauty of the essays. Did you, I wonder, think of their beauty as you read? Or only of their aptness, commonsense, fun, and sometimes pathos? As I have suggested already, I do not believe there is any standard of beauty that can be defined, though I have heard learned men argue most interestingly on both sides of the question. But luckily most if not all of us do like things that we consider beautiful, and what really matters is that we should find some things beautiful, and the more beauty we are conscious of the better. So we

shall do well to look for beauty. I, at any rate, have found beauty of three kinds in these essays—of thought, of feeling, and of language. As an instance of the first I will quote this: "That bit of seaweed opened many windows in us, but they all looked out on different scenes, and reminded us of something individual and inexplicable, of something which is a part of us and of that ultimate loneliness that belongs to all of us. Everything speaks a private language to each of us that we can never translate to others. I do not know what the lilac says to you; but to me it talks of a garden gate over which it grew long ago. I am a child again, standing within the gate. . . ." Perhaps the passage is not in touch with your own type of thought, but it is only a suggestion: you can easily find something else the thought in which is more akin to yours.

Here is what I should call beauty of feeling. "There are times when the dog approximates so close to our intelligence that he seems to be one of us, a sort of humble relation of ourselves, with our elementary feelings but not our gifts of expression, our joy but not our laughter, our misery but not our tears, our thoughts but not our speech. To sentence him to death would be almost like homicide, and the day of his reprieve should be celebrated as a festival." And that is all about a dog. A man who can feel like that would be worth knowing; and there are many similar evidences of beautiful feeling in these essays.

For mere beauty of language we have never far to seek. But perhaps it is wrong to say "mere beauty of language," for that suggests playing with words, and do you not think Alpha does more than that?—what he is talking about counts too. Still, I am inclined to think that the last page of *On Mowing* would seem beautiful even to a foreigner who did not understand a word of it.

Read it aloud and see if there is not pleasure in the mere sound of the words.

One other feature of these essays calls for separate notice. Almost every one of them is full of allusions to, or is in some way reminiscent of literary and historical characters introduced in the most natural and pleasing way. I must confess that the effect on me is almost that of arousing jealousy, for Alpha has a mind stored with every kind of quotation and literary memory ready at his beck and call—they almost seem to wait on him without his summoning them. He presents in short, a fine example of what a great addition to the pleasures of life a real familiarity with the world of letters can bring. That reminds me of a saying that no man was ever great through books who would not have been great without them. Here we have a man who is obviously no book-worm, but who finds an endless enjoyment in books and all they can teach him and reveal to him, just as he does in the real world of men and cities and nature. Not that Alpha does not love books as books and fine writing as writing, as you



can easily see from the essay *On Word-Magic*, and several others. As a matter of fact, if anyone cared to go through the volume making himself acquainted with all the literary and historical personages who appear on its pages, he would have, by the time his researches were finished, quite a passable knowledge of what might be regarded as the literary birthright of all good Britons.

Still, when all is said and done, the supreme merit of the book is something other than literary excellence, or what some might call the flavour of culture which pervades it. At least, I will close with this suggestion and leave you to think it over. Has not Alpha done for us what the less delightful schoolmasters in *Stalky and Co.* did for their boys?— •

Tried to teach us common-sense,  
Truth and God's own common-sense,  
Which is more than Knowledge.

